

# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

## **Monterey, California**



## **THESIS**

**INNOVATION FROM BELOW: THE ROLE OF  
SUBORDINATE FEEDBACK IN IRREGULAR WARFARE  
OPERATIONS**

by

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A review of cases that span a century of US irregular warfare operations provides evidence that, at times, the military hierarchy did allow subordinates to innovate and did listen to their recommendations, with positive outcomes as a result. This evidence also illustrates, however, that the military has failed to institutionalize these lessons and is prone to have to re-learn them from conflict to conflict, and at times this relearning process has resulted in the failure of an operation. Leaders must ensure that innovation and feedback are a part of the conduct of irregular warfare operations.

This thesis will illustrate that the doctrine and culture of the United States military does not provide for the systematic analysis and exploitation of subordinate innovation. The purpose of this thesis is to clearly articulate the important role that innovation and feedback from subordinates can have on the outcome of operations. The cases put forth to illustrate these points are the Philippines (1898-1902), Vietnam, and El Salvador. The goal is to draw conclusions and make recommendations on how the US military might better capture and utilize subordinate feedback and innovation in future operations.

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IN IRREGULAR WARFARE OPERATIONS**

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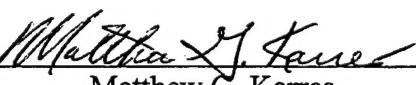
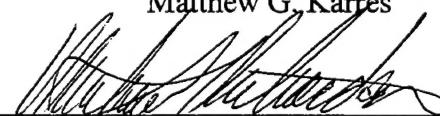
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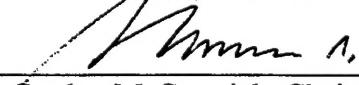
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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis will illustrate that the doctrine and culture of the United States military does not provide for the systematic analysis and exploitation of subordinate innovation. The purpose of this thesis is to clearly articulate the important role that innovation and feedback from subordinates can have on the outcome of operations. The cases put forth to illustrate these points are the Philippines (1898-1902), Vietnam, and El Salvador. The goal is to draw conclusions and make recommendations on how the US military might better capture and utilize subordinate feedback and innovation in future operations.

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Finally, to all those soldiers, non-commissioned officers, warrant and commissioned officers who have come before, are presently serving, and will serve in the future, we hope that our efforts add to the collective body of knowledge that has made our Army the magnificent institution it is today. Never forget, above all else, it is our knowledge and capacity to apply that knowledge which will lead us to victory in the future.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Of the numerous variables that impact the outcome of irregular warfare operations, leadership is one of the most critical. Much has been written about the state of today's military leadership, and if there is indeed truth in the perception that the current operational environment demands no mistakes and is micromanaged, then this characteristic is contrary to the nature of the preponderance of operations that the military has been participating in over the past decade. These operations require decentralization and the freedom of the local commander to create local solutions given the situations that he faces. These local solutions, history has shown us, can have a dramatic and positive effect on the outcome of irregular military operations.

A review of cases that span a century of US irregular warfare operations provides evidence that, at times, the military hierarchy did allow subordinates to innovate and did listen to their recommendations, with positive outcomes as a result. This evidence also illustrates, however, that the military, particularly the Army, has failed to institutionalize these lessons and is prone to have to re-learn them from conflict to conflict, and at times this relearning process has resulted in the failure of an operation. Leaders must ensure that innovation and feedback are a part of the conduct of irregular warfare operations. Furthermore, both parties—leaders and subordinates—must share the responsibility of institutionalizing experiences so that the lessons learned in the confusing realm of irregular conflicts are not learned in vain.

This thesis will illustrate, through a survey of the literature and historic case studies, that the doctrine and culture of the United States military (the Army, in particular) does not provide for the systematic analysis and exploitation of innovation

from below, at the operational level or at the planning and policy development level. The purpose of this thesis is to clearly articulate the important role that innovation and feedback from subordinates can have on the outcome of operations. The cases we use to illustrate these points are the Philippines (1898-1902), Vietnam, and El Salvador. The goal is to draw conclusions and make recommendations about how the US military and the Army, in particular, might better capture and utilize subordinate feedback and innovation in future operations.

#### A. LITERATURE SURVEY

A major step in completing an academic study is to survey the relevant body of literature in order to determine which authors, if any, have addressed the selected topic and what insights their works provide (VanEvera, 1997, p.100). From this broad review of the literature, one can refine or change the search plan and objectives of research on the selected topic. With respect to the importance of subordinate feedback in the development of policies and plans during the execution of counterinsurgency campaigns, the literature can be divided into four categories: academic literature, military doctrinal publications, professional military journals, and historic accounts. Each category, with the exclusion of historic accounts, can be further divided into counterinsurgency literature and leadership literature. Of the first three categories surveyed—academic literature, military doctrinal publications, and professional journals—the role of subordinate feedback in counterinsurgency is either completely absent or only referred to in passing with no detailed analysis offered. It is only in the last category, historic accounts, where we see specific evidence of the role played by subordinate feedback in counterinsurgency operations.

It seems ironic that although academic and doctrinal publications fail to address the role of subordinate feedback on the development of counterinsurgency strategies and tactics, personal and historical accounts of military operations clearly indicate that significant efforts are routinely made by operational level personnel to provide “ground truth” and insightful feedback to higher levels. This makes more sense when one considers that the historical accounts describe feedback that was often not reviewed or analyzed, let alone exploited for advantage (Malcolm, *Beacons in the Night*, 1993, and Donovan, *Once A Warrior King*, 1985). In several cases, accounts state that feedback was ignored outright by the receiving command (Sheehan, 1988, p.111-112).

The fact that only one segment of the broader literature addresses the selected topic raises serious questions about how low a priority is given the role of subordinate feedback by those who propose concepts of operations, those key military members who determine the doctrine to execute those concepts of operations, and finally, the leaders who supervise the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

## **B. ACADEMIC LITERATURE**

The first category surveyed was academic literature. In academic counterinsurgency literature, authors propose hypotheses concerning the most effective methods for successfully executing counterinsurgency warfare. Of the publications reviewed, the theorists primarily emphasize counterinsurgency methods which are applicable to the determination of strategy by high level civilian and military officials without regard to the execution of those strategies by lower level personnel (Shafer, 1988, pp.104-132). John D. Pustay's study entitled, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, provides an example of this approach:

The United States must create and structure a counterinsurgency-support establishment that can detect Communist insurgency in its early stages of development and can quickly deliver the needed assistance authorized by the President. Because of the cellular nature of the development of Communist insurgency, early action can bring about victory with a minimum expenditure of indigenous and externally supplied resources. The limited nature of external support will tend to enhance the palatability of this assistance as viewed by the affected government concerned with its people's fears of neo-colonialism. The consequent limited involvement of United States will make this assistance more palatable to the prestige-conscious and economy-conscious American people. (1965, p.192).

Despite the fact that some works of theorists and researchers provide very detailed recommendations for the execution of unit level counterinsurgency methods (Pustay, 1965; Kitson, 1971; Gallagher, 1992), the discussion of the methods does not include specific instructions or information on the development, existence, or importance of a mechanism for the analysis and utilization of subordinate feedback. Frank Kitson's book, *Low Intensity Operations*, is replete with case studies of company level operations based on the author's personal experiences in Kenya while operating against the Mau Mau and Malaya against Chinese insurgents, but fails to address the role played by subordinate feedback (pp.102-126). There is no discussion on the topic of how the commander receives and analyzes feedback from subordinate units, determines measures of effectiveness, or identifies tactical or operational innovations in order to enhance the conduct of operations. James Gallagher's, *Low Intensity Conflict* (1992), which heavily influenced the development of contemporary American counterinsurgency doctrine, and is another work which focuses on unit level (brigade, battalion and below) operations, but fails to address subordinate feedback as an effective tool in counterinsurgency operations.

Like counterinsurgency theorists, academic authors writing about leadership do not effectively address the role of subordinate feedback either. Although Stephen D.

Clement's article, "Systems Leadership", identifies the development of information systems as one of four critical responsibilities of current and future military leaders (1985, p.165), there is no specific discussion on the development of mechanisms to ensure the flow of subordinate feedback as part of the formalized information system. Carlton Whitehead and John Blair's article, "Designing and Leading the Army of the Future", argues that the Army has historically tended to degrade its ability to operate effectively in ambiguous environments by centralizing and formalizing decision-making procedures (1985, p.140). However, Carlton and Blair present no specific solutions beyond recommending that leaders become aware of this tendency toward mechanistic design and make efforts to counter these tendencies.

Perhaps theoretical authors such as Frank Kitson, Pustay and Gallagher, or academic researchers including Schwarz (1991), Hoffman (1992), and Metz (1995) do not address the role of subordinate feedback because they do not sufficiently appreciate that their theories of warfare must be adapted to diverse circumstances and that one significant avenue for the necessary learning and adaptation process is feedback from the field.

### **C. DOCTRINAL PUBLICATIONS**

According to Army field manual 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, doctrine is the "fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions" (1997). In essence, military doctrine constitutes the cumulative knowledge of a military organization distilled into a body of principles that provide guidance for the conduct of operations and "manuals represent the primary means by which military doctrine is disseminated through the armed forces" (Beckett, 1999, p.145).

At the joint forces level, Joint Publication 1-02, *Operations Other Than War*, written for the planning and execution of military operations merging into counterinsurgency, makes no reference to the utility of seeking information from subordinate levels of command. Similarly, the Army level counterinsurgency publication, Field Manual 100-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*, “provides operational guidance for commanders in low intensity conflict” (1990). Ironically, FM 100-20 defines the different natures of war and low intensity conflict, explains the Army’s role during counterinsurgency operations, and even discusses the necessity of integrating feedback from members of Civilian Advisory Committees into the command decision process (p. 2-12), but fails to address the issue of integrating subordinate feedback into that same command decision making process.

Field Manual 7-98, *Operations in a Low Intensity Conflict*, produced by the Army Infantry School, primarily for Brigade and Battalion commanders and their staffs, addresses considerations for the training, planning and execution of Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC) operations, including support for counterinsurgencies. One section specifically covers the leadership characteristics of effective field commanders in the conduct of LIC operations (Chapter 6, Para 6-6). The list of leadership characteristics includes many of the commonly identified leadership traits applicable across the spectrum of warfare, but does not include valuing subordinate feedback or even developing effective communications between commanders and their subordinates during the execution of operations. Neither does Field Manual 90-8, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations*, refer to the importance of bottom-up communications during the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

The capstone Army leadership manual, FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*, begins with a list of attributes that the then Army Chief of Staff, General Carl Vuono, stated good leaders embody. The General wrote that in order to be a good leader, one must “be a good listener” (1990, p. ii). The manual does provide some instruction on good listening techniques (p.5) but fails to discuss what a leader should do with information received. The final chapter of FM 22-100 provides a simple discussion of three simplified styles of leadership, but only in the “Participating” style of leadership is subordinate feedback identified as relevant to the execution of leadership duties. Additionally, the principles of leadership and the way they are presented in the manual are indicative of a top-driven organization in which subordinate feedback is clearly considered important but not as a potentially innovative device. Rather, subordinate feedback is important as a source of raw data for evaluation by formalized information collection systems (p.7). Field Manual 22-102, *Soldier Team Development*, reinforces the perception that Army doctrine writers consider subordinate feedback less important as a tool for change than as a source of data for other information systems.

Doctrinal publications provide a window into the military culture from which they arise. The views through this window reveal many of the values and priorities that comprise the organization’s culture. The fact that doctrinal publications do not address the necessity of incorporating subordinate ‘on the ground’ knowledge and experience into the evolutionary development of policies and plans, or a commander’s decision cycle, is indicative of a strategic culture that is resistant to change or adaptation. This idea of a culture resistant to change will be revisited later in the course of this study. For now, we can assume that perhaps doctrine writers do not make the effort to discuss systems or

mechanisms for the utilization of subordinate feedback because the concept seems far too intuitive to need to address.

#### D. PROFESSIONAL MILITARY JOURNALS

Journal articles generally constitute well-researched documents that advance or report knowledge of relevance to a particular professional audience (Hairston, 1999, p. 617). In the case of this survey, several military journals were reviewed for information on the topic of subordinate feedback. These journals included branch specific publications: *Infantry*, *Military Intelligence*, and *Special Warfare* magazines, as well as the Army periodicals *Military Review* and *Parameters*. Because no articles were found in any of the journals that focused on the topic of subordinate feedback, low intensity conflict and leadership articles were instead reviewed.

The vast majority of articles in the three branch specific journals (*Infantry*, *Military Intelligence*, and *Special Warfare*) focus primarily on conventional military operations and current events related to branch specific professional development. This was especially surprising of *Special Warfare* magazine, which is a publication of the JFK Special Warfare Center, the proponent organization for Army unconventional warfare. In all the articles reviewed, only one, "Combat Information Flow", by Kevin B. Smith in *Military Review* (April 1989), discusses the importance and complexities of communication between seniors and subordinates. Although the article focuses on decision making in high intensity, conventional situations where the decision maker's time is limited, the basic premise - that there are cognitive obstacles to effective communications between senior and subordinates - is relevant in most environments (p.42-54).

## E. HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

The primary evidence for the invaluable role played by subordinate feedback in counterinsurgency warfare is provided by the personal memoirs and descriptive histories of Americans who took part in military campaigns either as members of insurgent force or counterinsurgent forces.

For instance, Franklin Lindsay, in his book, *Beacons in the Night*, comments that communication with his headquarters during his time with Yugoslav partisan forces was often frustrating not only because of technical difficulties with his team's radio, but also because "there was seldom any acknowledgement of our requests. It was like dropping pebbles in a well and hearing no splash" (1993, p.185). Lindsay also comments that Allied decision makers ignored evidence that Tito's Partisans were preparing to employ "iron tactics" to control the Yugoslav population. Allied senior leaders would not acknowledge the significance of the issue until it manifested itself in Tito's population control measures towards the end of World War II (p.294).

Ben Malcolm in *White Tigers* provides examples of the role of subordinate feedback during Korean War special operations. Like Lindsay, Malcolm had troubles communicating with his headquarters. Malcolm discussed the importance of quickly interrogating prisoners before they were sent to his headquarters because, "once they got to Seoul they disappeared and we never got any additional information that might have been of use to us" (p.74). Additionally, Malcolm writes, "the information flow generally went one way – Leopard Base [Malcolm's base] to Seoul. We got very little in return" (p.74). In the book's final chapter, Malcolm describes the frustration he felt, years later during his tour in Vietnam, when he realized that none of the unconventional warfare

lessons he and his peers had learned in Korea were incorporated into the doctrine, plans, or policies taught to the American soldiers engaged in counterinsurgency efforts against the Viet Cong insurgents (pp.201-210).

In *Once a Warrior King*, David Donovan describes his experiences as an advisor to South Vietnamese irregular forces during the Vietnam War. With the exception of the formal reporting system, Donovan provides no evidence that there was any formal analysis of advisor experiences conducted at the province level or above. The only method for circulating innovative counterinsurgency ideas and techniques among advisors was by way of informal, socially motivated meetings between peers. As Donovan describes it, these “rest and recuperation” meetings allowed peers to exchange ideas, make suggestions, and critique methods employed in other areas (1985, p.160), but it is clear that his chain of command did nothing to facilitate these information exchanges. Instead, advisors discussed innovations on their own whenever they were on leave

It is interesting to note that such an important topic as the role of subordinate feedback and providing ‘ground truth’ knowledge to higher level commands, is addressed only in the guise of first-person accounts and historic retellings of events. Ironically, the topic is addressed through human interest stories in popular literature, and not scholastic examinations or doctrinal references.

#### F. IN SUM

It is difficult to rectify the disconnect between accounts of how much effort subordinates expended in providing detailed and timely information and feedback to their commanders and how little that feedback actually influenced the decisions made by those

commanders and their seniors. One potential explanation might be that commanders at all levels were overwhelmed with information from diverse sources, to include subordinates, seniors, and peers, any of whom might be using both institutionalized and informal means of communication (Smith, p.43). Another explanation may be that the rank-driven nature of the American military bureaucracy prioritizes the analysis or utilization of information supplied from superiors first, and analysis of a subordinate's feedback second. In essence, many leaders give preferential attention to the discourse of their superiors at the cost of information provided by subordinates.

Conceivably, analyzing all of the incoming information may just be too difficult to accomplish and commanders simply ignore information from sources that do not constitute a 'direct threat' to their future (Donovan, p.161). Another explanation might be that the perceptions reported by subordinates are typically viewed with skepticism. According to Neil Sheehan in *A Bright Shining Lie*, there is a common theme of commanders and headquarters personnel easily discounting reports from the field because those subordinates reporting the information do not command an understanding of the concept of operations or what is more commonly referred to as the "big picture" (Sheehan, p. 114).

Whatever the explanation, it is interesting to wonder why the topic is not the subject of a previous study, especially when many historical accounts provide distinct evidence that feedback was routinely provided by subordinates and often constituted the *only* informed perception of the environment on which counterinsurgency operations should have been conducted.

The following chapter provides a detailed review of subordinate feedback and its application during counterinsurgency operations conducted by the American military at the turn of the century against Philippine insurgent forces.

## **II. PHILIPPINES**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The US Army counterinsurgency campaign in the Philippines from 1899-1902 is a case study that provides a wealth of information on the methodology of conducting this type of operation. This case clearly illustrates the complexities of counterinsurgency and the requirement for flexibility throughout the chain of command to change strategy if it is evident that there is a need to do so. In light of this need for flexibility, the Philippine War further highlights the critical impact that subordinates in the field have on affecting such change. As the Army conducted the counterinsurgency campaign in the Philippines, several subordinate officers with regular, direct involvement with the intricacies of pacifying the large archipelago had a critical impact on crafting the appropriate strategy that led to successful pacification of the Philippines. Before discussing the details of the impact that these subordinate officers had on the outcome of the conflict, however, it is important to both provide background information about this complex conflict and to illustrate how the original US strategy of pacification was flawed and in need of change.

### **B. BACKGROUND**

Soon after the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Commodore George Dewey soundly defeated the Spanish navy in the Battle of Manila Bay and was confident that he could subsequently force the surrender of the remaining Spanish forces holding the capital city of Manila. Dewey then requested a small US Army force to occupy the capital city once the Spanish capitulated, and upon arrival from San Francisco almost three months later, the force, commanded by Major General Wesley Merritt, besieged Manila. Misleading signals from President McKinley and Commodore Dewey

caused the Filipino nationalist forces fighting the Spanish to misunderstand US intentions in the archipelago, which led to an eventual US-Filipino standoff on the outskirts of Manila. The US refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the revolutionary Filipino leader, Emilio Aguinaldo, to govern the archipelago, and Aguinaldo's refusal to subordinate his forces to US command further contributed to the tensions between US and Filipino elements besieging the Spanish in Manila and set the stage for further conflict between the two groups.

Finally, on 13 August 1898, Spanish forces surrendered to the US under the stipulation that the Americans keep the Filipinos out of the capital city in order to avoid a slaughter of the Spanish. Realizing this indicated that they were not valued at all as allies of the US, Aguinaldo's forces then fell back and began to besiege the Americans in Manila. Further escalating the conflict was the 10 December 1898 signing of the Treaty of Paris which transferred sovereignty of the Philippines from Spain to the US. Then on 4 February 1899, a US sentry fired on a Filipino patrol that refused to answer his challenge, thus sparking gunfire throughout the lines, followed by an American offensive. The Philippine War had begun (Linn, 1989, p. 12).

Aguinaldo was pressured by his advisors to fight this war conventionally in order to garner support for Filipino independence. They believed that if they organized themselves and fought in the image of the Europeans who had colonized them for so long, they would "demonstrate the high level of civilization of the Filipinos and encourage recognition of their independence" (Linn, 1989, p. 12). However, the conventionally organized Filipino forces were absolutely no match for American firepower, training, and organization, and over the course of the next nine months they

were soundly defeated throughout the island of Luzon and found themselves in a state of turmoil. Although the Filipino forces were not initially able to capitalize on their close ties with the population and, in turn, their capacity to wage guerrilla war, by 13 November 1899 Aguinaldo abandoned all conventional efforts and turned to all-out guerrilla warfare. With the US Regulars now occupying the entire island of Luzon and the Filipino Republican Army having been soundly defeated, Aguinaldo relied on his previous experience as a guerrilla against the Spanish to devise his strategy. Demonstrating an understanding of the US military and American culture, he hoped to protract the conflict in order to exhaust the US Army or sway US public opinion to demand a withdrawal of American forces from the Philippines.

This reorganized Filipino force had typical guerrilla characteristics both organizationally and operationally. As stated above, Aguinaldo sought to wear down US forces through protracted conflict and counted on the growing anti-imperialist movement in America to facilitate the removal of US forces and Filipino independence. Organizationally, the Filipinos were divided into geographical districts and further into sub-units at the province and zone level and consisted of both regulars and part-time militia. They typically operated at the zone level in bands of approximately fifty men, and these combat forces were supported by an even larger civilian infrastructure that hid weapons, paid taxes, and provided food and intelligence. Operationally, Aguinaldo's guerrillas conducted harassing raids to cut telegraph lines, attacked convoys, and raided villages that accepted US civil government. These hit and run operations were designed to wear down US morale, and after such attacks the guerrillas were able to quickly

disappear and blend in with the local populace, rapidly changing from “insurrecto” to “amigo” (Linn, 1989, p. 17).

Similar to Aguinaldo’s guerrilla organization, the American forces were organized geographically. Major General Elwell Otis, who had replaced General Merritt as commander of the Division of the Philippines in August of 1898, divided the country into four departments, as the US Army had done in the Reconstruction South and along the Western Frontier. Each department was further divided into districts and provinces, with hundreds of company garrisons in villages throughout the Division of the Philippines. This method of organization facilitated pacification of the large archipelago through military and civic action, which was the cornerstone of US strategy when the conventional phase of the war ended. The pacification plan that the Army pursued was based upon General Orders 43 and 40, implemented in 1899 and 1900 respectively. These orders stipulated that the Filipinos would establish a municipal government in each village, province, and district, and that once this was accomplished the military would move quickly to win over the population through civic action and to quell disorder in the countryside (Linn 2000, p. 200). By the middle of 1900, this emphasis on municipal government was determined to be ineffective. The strategy directed by GO’s 40 and 43 will be analyzed in further detail in the following section.

### **C. US COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY**

According to GO 43 the Army was to establish municipal governments in every town, each consisting of a mayor, town council, and a police force (Linn, 1989, p. 21). These town governments were expected to conduct typical functions, from tax collection, to public services, to education, and the same framework was to be applied throughout

the country. Implementation of this policy was based on the assumption that the provinces were peaceful and that the people were receptive to US authority. No consideration was given to the regional differences that existed throughout the Philippines.

Before the US Army realized that operations guided by General Order's (GO) 40 and 43 were not effective, operations consisted of civic action in the villages and search and destroy patrols in the countryside. Although the civic action projects were generally well received, they could not compensate Filipinos for the terror and taxes inflicted on them by the guerrillas. Nor could they negate the presence of the guerrillas' infrastructure, which effectively ensured popular support of the guerrillas. Operationally, the Army's search and destroy tactics in the field exerted little pressure on the guerrillas, who not only had a wide expanse of formidable territory in which to retreat, but who also had a populace that they could hide amongst. Army patrols expended a great deal of effort penetrating the dense forests and jungles of the archipelago and were rewarded with little enemy contact and much exhaustion, disease, and frustration. All the while the guerrilla infrastructure, unbeknownst to the Army, was entrenching itself further into Filipino society.

While the headquarters of the Division of the Philippines in Manila was directing these policies that were having little effect on the guerrillas, there was an interesting transformation occurring at the garrison level in the field. As garrison commanders and soldiers were gaining more experience and knowledge of local culture, as a result of living immersed in Filipino society, they were beginning to realize that GO's 40 and 43 were not applicable to Filipino society and that the guerrilla infrastructure was well

established in most areas. Resulting from the decentralized nature of the operations and given the vast distances that separated many garrisons and the lack of timely communications, most commanders had the flexibility to come up with their own localized solutions to the situation they faced. This flexibility was in some cases granted to the subordinate by a higher commander who acknowledged the need for a localized campaign. At other times subordinates “did not hesitate to reject policies that they knew would be impractical” (Linn, 1989, p. 169). Regardless of how the subordinate commanders gained this flexibility, it was critical to the successful outcome of US counterinsurgency operations.

As officers and soldiers in the field began to see the weaknesses inherent in GO 43, they realized that there was no way to universally apply the directive throughout the country because of the vast differences in culture, economics, and politics that existed from region to region. For example, the tax structure outlined in GO 43 itemized the industries and trades that were subject to taxation, but ignored the fact that several districts were dependent on agriculture and had no mechanism to implement taxation under such circumstances. Agricultural municipalities were still responsible for the salaries of the police, teachers, and local administrators, but GO 43 did not provide guidelines for collecting taxes in these areas. As a result, the Filipino farmers were “taxed to death” and the people gradually lost faith in the US system (Linn, 1989, p. 36).

Along with the poorly structured taxation system, there were several other problems with GO 43 which made winning over the populace difficult. One of these was that the Filipinos were suspicious of US control after years of colonial rule by the Spanish and the Army bureaucracy in Manila compounded this by being just as slow and inefficient.

General Order 43 also imposed many restrictions on the Filipinos that ignored local customs and cultural traditions by outlawing such things as cockfighting and gambling, which historically provided sources of municipal income in many villages (Linn, 1989, p. 36). Finally, being unfamiliar with the local language and lacking sufficient information, most local commanders did not realize that the government they were creating was in actuality a shadow government for the insurgents. The commander of the Ilocos Norte Province succinctly stated that by May of 1900, “every pueblo to my certain knowledge had its insurrecto municipal government, many of their officials being the same as those put in by us” (Linn, 1989, p. 38). This, by far, was the most critical failing of GO 43; by misunderstanding the inner workings of Filipino society it rendered the leaders of the US Army ignorant, allowing the guerrillas to piggyback on the same local governments that the Americans were creating. The guerrillas could thus neutralize US efforts and continue to resist.

By mid-1900 soldiers were beginning to realize that “this business of fighting and civilizing and educating at the same time doesn’t mix very well” (Gates, p. 188), and “even an officer as firmly committed to the concept of benevolent pacification as General MacArthur was becoming depressed and seeking a way to end the guerrilla war as quickly as possible”(Gates, p. 192). Essentially, the combination of being deceived by the local Filipinos and the inability of the Americans to recognize the bond between the guerrillas and the populace, allowed an organized resistance and a strong guerrilla shadow government to develop (May, p. 192).

#### **D. CONTRIBUTING TO A CHANGE IN STRATEGY**

It is evident that the counterinsurgency strategy of non-military pacification techniques employed by the US Army was becoming less effective as of mid-1900. It is equally clear that the decentralized nature of the operation provided the soldiers in the field with a great deal of experience from which they gained a practical understanding of the local situation and learned to implement pragmatic pacification methods. When they realized that the policies implemented under GO 43 might cause the pacification process to fail, many of these officers and soldiers in the field voiced their concerns up the chain of command, and in some cases greatly contributed to the eventual success of US counterinsurgency operations.

One young officer who had a significant impact on the methods employed by the Americans in the archipelago was Captain Henry T. Allen of the 43d Infantry who worked on the islands of Samar and Leyte. Allen recognized that the strategy of "benevolence alone was not enough to accomplish the goal of bringing peace to the island" (Gates, p. 200). He then adopted the more balanced approach of humanely treating non-combatants and engaging in hard-fought military action against the guerrillas, designed to make resisting very costly to the insurgents. In Schoolbooks and Krags, John Morgan Gates concludes that Allen's successes convinced his peers as well as his superiors, such as Generals J. Franklin Bell and William Kobbe, that such a strategy was not only effective but should be adopted by the Army overall.

Another example of a leader in the field expressing concern over the Army's flawed counterinsurgency strategy is Brigadier General Samuel S. Sumner, the commander of the First District, Department of Southern Luzon. Although Sumner

himself was a high-ranking officer, the critical action of a subordinate making a substantiated recommendation to a superior still applies. A proven officer with a fabulous reputation, Sumner realized that the situation in the Batangas region was stalemated and decided to adopt the conventional strategy of randomly searching the countryside for the insurgents. This approach produced few results other than breaking the spirits and wrecking the health of his soldiers given the inhospitable environment, so Sumner recommended a change. He decided to take a more drastic approach that imposed severe costs on the noncombatant population in hopes of bringing about an expedient end to the conflict in his district. Stating that “the amount of country actually controlled by us is about as much as can be covered by the fire from our guns”, Sumner made two such recommendations to his superiors, only to be denied and forced to continue the futile strategy of searching the countryside (May, p. 231). Still, Sumner was expected to produce results, and with none forthcoming the Commanding General of the Philippines, Adna Chaffee, himself under pressure to quickly end the fighting, replaced Sumner with J. Franklin Bell. Taking over just after a massacre of US soldiers by the guerrillas on the island of Samar, Bell was in turn pressured by Chaffee for results. Ironically, Bell immediately implemented the same policies that Sumner had recommended over six months earlier, and with those policies he had the district pacified in three months.

This example illustrates two different aspects of subordinate feedback. First, it reveals the costs of not considering what a subordinate in the field recommends. In the case of Sumner, the perceived ineptitude of his actions led to his relief and the end of his career, and it also dragged the war on in the district for at least eight more months at the cost of more US and Filipino lives. Second, it demonstrates the main point, that

subordinate input and actions are critical to the success of a counterinsurgency operation.

Again, the US was pursuing an ineffective counterinsurgency strategy. Two successive subordinates made similar recommendations for change, and when finally implemented they quickly led to successful completion of the operation.

By the summer of 1900 the Commanding General of the Division of the Philippines, General Arthur MacArthur, began receiving recommendations from officers throughout his command for how to change the Army's counterinsurgency strategy.

Many of them proposed a much more severe policy, even advocating summary executions and press censorship which were referred to as "methods of European nations to deal with rebellious Asiatics" (Gates, p. 190). As General MacArthur considered his options, Lieutenant William Johnston's report, entitled "Investigation into the Methods Adopted by the Insurgents for Organizing and Maintaining a Guerrilla Force" reached his desk (War Department Report, p. 265). Because Johnston had demonstrated a "remarkable flair for counterinsurgency intelligence" he had been given the latitude by his superiors to take advantage of a schism between the insurgents and the religious sect Guardia de Honor, when its leader, Crispulo Patajo, offered to expose the insurgent network in the area (Linn, 1989, p. 42). Patajo proved himself to be loyal and valuable, not only by fighting alongside the Americans but by educating Johnston on the connection between the towns being organized under GO 43 and the guerrilla bands.

Over the course of several weeks, Johnston pieced together the guerrilla infrastructure in La Union Province by thoroughly investigating nine different villages. He concluded that there was a high level of guerrilla influence in the US-garrisoned province, and that the same municipal governments established and run by the US were actively aiding the

guerrillas to varying degrees (War Department, p. 263). Johnston published his report on 21 May 1900, and stated that, with the assistance of Patajo, he had quickly succeeded in unraveling the guerrilla infrastructure throughout the province. He went on to further note that regarding the previous anonymity the guerrillas enjoyed, “such a state of affairs does not or could not now obtain in the province” thanks to his efforts (War Department, p. 263), and that “not a gun nor an insurgent remained in this large district” (Johnston, p. 9).

One might suspect that a report from a junior officer in a remote outpost would not have a theater-wide effect on counterinsurgency strategy. However, in Lieutenant Johnston’s case his analysis of guerrilla methods had a tremendous impact all the way to the top of the Division of the Philippines chain of command. Johnston’s report immediately effected change at the local level when his province commander, Colonel William P. Duvall, directed that the Army change its strategy in his province. This meant changing from pursuing guerrilla bands in the countryside and supporting the municipal government to a combination of destroying the bands, denying them municipal support, and exposing the guerrilla infrastructure in the towns, as Johnston had described. Duvall employed Johnston’s source, Patajo, as well as Johnston himself, to establish a new provincial intelligence system that was so effective the Army was able to “pick up insurrectos like chickens off a roost” (Linn, 1989, p. 43). La Union province was pacified in its entirety in five months. A large measure of the success seen in La Union resulted from Colonel Duvall’s ability to encourage Johnston in his efforts. He trusted this junior officer to investigate the municipal governments that so far had not met the expectations outlined in GO 43. Furthermore, Duvall had faith enough in his subordinate’s report to

act on his recommendations, with the dividend being paid in a quickly pacified province (Linn, 1989, p. 45).

Additional evidence regarding the effect that Johnston's "Guerrilla Methods" report had on the Division of the Philippines is seen in the endorsements on the actual report as it worked its way to the Commanding General of the Division, General Arthur MacArthur. Duvall's comments include, "This report indicates...the considerable success attained through the methods adopted", while the Department Commander, General Loyd Wheaton, wrote that the report "illustrates the character of many of the natives holding civil office...in this Department" (War Department, p. 264). Finally, as he endorsed the report and sent it to the Adjutant General of the Army in Washington, General MacArthur himself stated that "It is altogether the best description which has reached these headquarters of the insurgent method of organizing and maintaining a guerrilla force" (War Department, pp. 264-65). MacArthur also encouraged the application of the report's methods to any part of the islands where they pertained, with only a few modifications specifically tailored to the local situation (Gates, p. 194).

As Brian Linn comments, "the impact of Johnston's findings were considerable", especially since MacArthur's view of the guerrillas "owes most of its inspiration directly to Johnston's 'Investigation'" (1989, p. 43). Other documents support the conclusion that Johnston's efforts had widespread effect and support. Johnston's Province Commander, Colonel Duvall, wrote in a letter of recommendation for Johnston in 1902 that "I frankly admit that without him I never could have had the success that I did" (War Department, p. 264). These comments demonstrate the ability of senior leaders to recognize and accept sound recommendations from subordinates, particularly once they realized the

original strategy offered them (e.g. GO 43) was ineffective. Essentially, the proven effectiveness of Johnston's recommendations validated his superiors as open-minded leaders in this particular chain of command.

One final example of the effect Johnston and his report had is demonstrated in the campaign in the final province to be pacified in the Philippines, the province of Batangas. Batangas was the last province to continue to resist and it contained the most dedicated guerrillas. General J. Franklin Bell was sent to complete pacification efforts in Batangas. With him he brought several officers who had proven their abilities in other provinces in the archipelago. Now a Captain, William Johnston went to work in Lipa, which Bell referred to as "the worst town in the brigade", and after a thorough investigation Johnston destroyed its guerrilla support system in three weeks (Johnston, pp. 17-18). Soon thereafter Johnston was sent to the village of Tiaon, where he performed in a similar manner. Again utilizing the techniques he honed in La Union Province, Johnston not only exposed the guerrilla infrastructure in Tiaon, but also used the town as a central location to gather together other officers in the area and educate them about his techniques. Officers from surrounding garrisons "were ordered to Tiaon to inform themselves as to conditions found and to receive instructions as to the methods used in procuring the information and breaking up the organizations" (Johnston, p. 20). Having been trusted by his superiors earlier, and having his methods validated in La Union, Johnston's superiors again depended on him to utilize his knowledge of the guerrilla system to assist in pacifying the final province in the Philippines.

In Johnston's efficiency report dated October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1902, Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell noted that Johnston's duties had been to break up the insurgent

organizations in the Province of Batangas, and that "I do not think anyone could possibly have performed this duty in an abler, more successful or satisfactory manner" (Johnston).

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

The US counterinsurgency campaign in the Philippines from 1899-1902 was very complex and required flexibility, decentralization, and trust in subordinates. After first attempting to pacify the large archipelago through the non-military means of General Order 43, the Army realized the ineffectiveness of such a policy and instituted many changes that resulted in the successful pacification of the Philippines. The changes that were critical to eventual success found their genesis in the actions and recommendations of several subordinate officers who had a great deal of experience at the true business end of the pacification process. The success in the Philippines that these subordinates directly contributed to is evidence that trusting subordinates and valuing their feedback is a critical aspect of the strategic, operational, and tactical leadership of a counterinsurgency operation.

Over fifty years later the US military would find itself embroiled in another counterinsurgency operation in Asia, this time in Vietnam. Although the Philippines case is exemplary and provides many lessons for conducting counterinsurgency operations, no two counterinsurgency conflicts have the same characteristics and therefore leaders should be careful not to use these same methods identically in other operations. There is no universal model for conducting counterinsurgency operations, but learning lessons from previous experiences is critical for providing a general framework for approaching this type of conflict. The key element in this framework, as the Philippines case

demonstrates, is listening to subordinates in the field. This is something which was done systematically or effectively in Vietnam, as we will see in the next chapter.

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### **III. VIETNAM**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Fifty years after the successful conclusion of the counterinsurgency operation in the Philippines, the first US advisors arrived in Indochina to begin what turned out to be a 25-year US commitment. Obviously this Army was completely different from the Army of the Philippines at the turn of the century, but there was clearly much the Army could have learned from its previous experiences. The leaders of the Army in Vietnam had gained their experience in World War II and Korea, and the military was focused on the threat posed by the Soviet Union during this period in the Cold War. Not only did the leaders in Vietnam come to this conflict with experiences vastly different from the officers in the Philippines, but the war they faced was significantly different from the war faced by the Army of the Philippines in 1898. In the Philippines the US was in the process of annexing the archipelago and faced “insurrectos”, whereas in Vietnam the US was supporting the government of South Vietnam in its attempt to defeat the nationalist movement of the communist Viet Cong as well as aggression from North Vietnam. Additionally, there is little evidence that the Army had any institutional memory of its past experiences in counterinsurgency. General James Collins demonstrated that the Army retained nothing of its experiences in the Philippines when he stated that

Had we had an organized body of literature [on the Philippine campaign] we would have saved ourselves a good deal of time and effort in Vietnam (Gates 1998, Ch. 5, p.6)

Or, as General Bruce Palmer said in 1989,

I wish that when I was the deputy chief of staff for operations at Department of the Army in 1964-1965, we

had studied the US Army's campaigns in the Philippines during the insurrection (Gates 1998, Ch. 5, p.6).

Further illustrating the Army's inability to learn from its past experiences was Palmer's comment on an article about the Philippine War published in *Military Review* in 1989. He averred that such an article "would have been tremendous help to us in sorting out our thoughts", but he did not even know that a similar article was published in *Military Review* in 1964 (Gates, 1998, Ch. 5, p.6). Although these two wars did not share universal characteristics and leaders had very different experiences and dealt with distinctly different operational environments, the value of fostering subordinate innovation should have remained a constant. Unfortunately, it did not.

The Vietnam War instead illustrates how a failure to recognize effective programs and accept input from subordinates can adversely affect the outcome of a counterinsurgency operation. In this war an Army hierarchy implementing a doctrine unfit for counterinsurgency operations sidelined successful pacification programs such as the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) and the Combined Action Platoon's (CAP) in favor of conventional force-oriented operations. Additionally, the Army had several opportunities to recognize its error in strategy when high-level government officials published well-documented reports that substantiated the need for a change in strategy. Finally, military officers commanding the war in Vietnam also suppressed feedback from advisors in the field who quickly recognized the failure in the Army's approach to the conflict. Because it failed in these three areas, one could argue the Army was bound to fail in its counterinsurgency efforts in Vietnam.

Since it is widely recognized that the overall Army counterinsurgency strategy in Vietnam was a failure and the history of US involvement is well known, this chapter will not devote any time to retelling the story that so many other authors have already told. Instead, it will draw from the school of thought that argues it was inadequate Army leadership, doctrine, and strategy, not US politicians, which led to the US failure in Vietnam.

## B. AN ARMY FAILURE

As described in the previous chapter, the initial counterinsurgency efforts of the Army of the Philippines failed to pacify the archipelago, but the sources of this failure were identified and soon corrected. In contrast, Army leaders in Vietnam failed to craft an appropriate counterinsurgency strategy over time. As a result, there is a theory that the US failure in Vietnam was not the politicians' fault (as is popularly believed), but instead resulted from the military's inability to craft an appropriate strategy to fight a counterinsurgency war. Several of these theories will be addressed in this section, demonstrating that the military had a realistic opportunity to conduct the war in a more effective manner. Among those who argue that the military proved unable to craft an appropriate strategy to fight a counterinsurgency—and thus it was the military's, not the politicians' fault the war was lost—there is widespread agreement that several programs approached the problem of counterinsurgency correctly, but were changed in order to fit into the conventional paradigm dictated by the larger military bureaucracy.

In his book The Army and Vietnam, Andrew Krepinevich describes how the US Army waged the Vietnam War in accordance with the “Army Concept” that was characterized as dogma and described as having “doctrinal rigidity at all levels”

(Krepinevich, p. xiii). ‘The concept’ grew out of the success that the military achieved in three conventional wars—World Wars I and II, and the Korean War—and its legitimacy was further confirmed by the threat of conventional war in Europe against the Soviet Union. However, as the US became increasingly involved in the war in Vietnam the military did not register the numerous signs that indicated ‘the concept’ was inappropriate for a counterinsurgency war. Because of the bias it had toward ‘the concept’, the Army “persisted in approaching the war within the framework of ‘the concept’”, unlike the doctrinal flexibility of the Army of the Philippines (Krepinevich, p. 7). Illustrative of this unwillingness by the Army to adapt ‘the concept’ to insurgent warfare is the prescription that the Army senior leadership offered for victory. Krepinevich notes that senior leaders, offered all the old prescriptions...increased firepower and mobility, more effective search and destroy operations, and...bombing the source of trouble, North Vietnam, into capitulation (p. 62).

While the senior military leaders were fixated on fitting the insurgency into the Army Concept, many civilians from the Department of State and Central Intelligence Agency argued for an approach more applicable to typical counterinsurgency operations. For example, a Department of State report stated that “the need, as always, was to provide security to the population” and rejected as ill-advised the military’s force request and strategy (Krepinevich, p. 161). Krepinevich further illustrates the successes achieved outside the Concept through the pacification process characterized by the Army’s Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) and the Marine Corps Combined Action Platoon programs (CAP), but describes these programs as eventually succumbing to the conventional processes outlined in ‘the concept’ (p. 69). The CIDG and CAP

approached the pacification problem similarly, and in both cases small groups of US personnel lived among the populace organizing, training, and employing popular local forces that provided security for the villages and hamlets. This technique achieved its success by empowering the Vietnamese people to provide security for their own land, and by showing legitimate commitment to the Vietnamese through the Americans living with them.

Similar to Krepinevich, Larry Cable theorizes that the US failed by basing its counterinsurgency doctrine in Vietnam on conventional capabilities and structure, not on understanding guerrilla warfare. In his book, Conflict of Myths, Cable presents two different models of guerrilla warfare, the insurgent model and the partisan model, and states that the US became fixated on the partisan model because it played into the conventional strengths of the US military. The partisan model assumes that any insurgent movement is externally sponsored by an “over the border presence of a regular army” which gives the US military a tangible target for its force-oriented maneuver warfare military (Cable, p. 5). According to Cable, the US believed that guerrillas could be defeated in a set-piece conventional battle, and that,

Doctrine and incorrectly comprehended experience combined to assure the very nature of the war in Vietnam would not be recognized (p. 180).

In addition to describing the failure of the US military to adopt an appropriate doctrine for combating an insurgent war, Cable also describes the strategic hamlet program as initially having the correct approach to pacification, only to eventually fail due to misapplication and misunderstanding of guerrilla warfare. Cable gives the initial concept of the strategic hamlet program high marks, but argues that the program quickly

failed not only because of the corrupt South Vietnamese government, but also because of the inability of the US military to fully comprehend guerrilla warfare and therefore properly manage the program (p. 199). The strategic hamlet program was based upon the British Delta Pacification Plan and had the support of the director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Roger Hilsman. Hilsman had a sound background in guerrilla warfare as a member of the OSS on the Burma-China border in World War II and believed that incorporating aspects of the British model into the strategic hamlet program provided a “strategic concept based upon a true understanding of the nature of internal war” (Cable, p. 197). According to Hilsman, the British in Malaya took a slow, methodical approach to their program and had a positive impact on countering the insurgency. Hilsman went on to state that the eventual failure of the US strategic hamlet program was a result of, among other things, the “forced draft pace of hamlet expansion” (Cable, p. 198). Additionally, the rapid rate of “pacification” of each hamlet was not accurately reported to MACV, but the senior American leadership chose to accept the inaccurate information over the objections of US advisors in the field who reported that the program was inadequate.

In his dissertation on organizational learning capabilities of the British and US militaries, John Nagl also points to the US military as the source of the American failure in the Vietnam War. Like the authors discussed above, Nagl describes the US military as “reliant on firepower and technological superiority” and argues that the army “proceeded with its historical role of destroying the enemy army—even if it had a hard time finding it” (p. 150). He cites Krepinevich and the Army Concept in his description of the way the

Army approached the conflict, and writes that the concept was “so deeply ingrained in the Army’s leaders that they refused to listen to innovators from below” (Nagl, p. 151).

After establishing the Army’s flawed concept of waging a counterinsurgency war, Nagl then approaches the problem somewhat differently from Cable or Krepinevich. Instead of focusing solely on flawed doctrine and a misunderstanding of guerrilla warfare, Nagl argues that the US military was not capable of learning, and therefore proved incapable of changing its flawed strategy as it waged the war in Vietnam. He states that the Army did not allow learning to occur, even in the face of obvious lessons and innovative recommendations from subordinate officers, the Marine Corps, and even the British Advisory Mission sent to assist in implementing lessons learned from its Malaya experience. Nagl provides several examples of innovation leading to successful pacification that were eventually suppressed by the Army’s leaders. Among the successful operations, Nagl includes the Marine Corps CAP and describes how the Army hierarchy suppressed its expansion and downplayed its success. Nagl further uses the Army-directed study called the Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN) as an example of a missed opportunity by the Army to change its approach to the conflict. PROVN was “the best chance for the Army to learn that its counterinsurgency procedures were flawed...and to implement organizational and doctrinal change”, but the study was also suppressed and downplayed by the Army hierarchy in favor of its traditional concept (Nagl, p. 199).

Finally, Thomas Adams, in US Special Operations Forces in Action, also addresses the flawed US concept in Vietnam, stating that

the stubborn conventional belief that battle is the essential function...of an army is reflected in the continuing attempts

to bring NVA/VC forces into decisive engagement where they could be annihilated (p. 110).

Not only did the Army have the wrong doctrine for this type of conflict, but Adams also examines the extent to which this approach ignored cultural issues that further contributed to the “troubled relationship between the GVN, the ARVN and the population they were allegedly there to nurture and protect” (Adams, p. 110).

In addition to his argument about the Army’s flawed approach in general, Adams specifically analyzes Special Forces (SF) programs. He argues that several SF programs, such as CIDG and Regional Force/Popular Force (RF/PF), began as successful unconventional warfare pacification programs that inevitably were absorbed and misused by the larger Army. These programs were designed to create regional popular forces made up of indigenous Vietnamese organized by SF detachments, and they were to provide security for the villages in which they lived. Adams goes into detail about the Army’s dislike for SF CIDG operations and the eventual misuse of the program for conventional infantry operations, such as border surveillance and mobile strike forces, thus playing into the enemy’s hands by leaving the villages unprotected. Adams concludes that such misuse of local forces “reflects the sincerely held belief that only conventional forces can be effective in battle” and that unconventional units were seen as useful only if they supported the conventional battle (p. 110).

In sum, then, a number of authors have argued that the Army and its senior leaders were fixated on a conventional concept that depended on firepower, maneuver, and attrition, with no understanding of the theories of guerrilla warfare. Additionally, these authors not only point to the doctrinal failure of the Army, but they also highlight

several programs that achieved success through traditional counterinsurgent methods, only to be suppressed by the Army hierarchy in favor of the conventional concept.

### C. ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE STRATEGY

In the Philippines the Army reversed its initial flawed approach to its counterinsurgency efforts and eventually prevailed. The fact that there were a number of opportunities presented to the Army in Vietnam to correct its flawed strategy raises a series of questions about why these were not taken. These opportunities came from every level of the chain of command and in a variety of forms. There were junior officers in the field who attempted to inform the Army hierarchy that it was pursuing the wrong strategy, there were senior officers who attempted to redirect that strategy, and there were several programs that were clearly successful. Although the Army in Vietnam could have corrected its misguided strategy, most of these opportunities were ignored, changed, or suppressed by the Army hierarchy, the reverse of what we saw in the Philippines case.

As mentioned previously, the Civilian Irregular Defense Group and Marine Corps Combined Action Platoon's are examples of programs that utilized classic counterinsurgency techniques for providing security for the citizens and separating the guerrillas from the populace. Not only were these programs following the fundamentals of counterinsurgency, but they were also extremely successful. Andrew Krepinevich says the CAP program "produced results...with CAP-protected villages progressing twice as fast as those with PF's [Popular Forces] alone", and Sir Robert Thompson of the British Advisory Mission in Saigon stated that "the use of CAP's is quite the best idea that I have seen in Vietnam, and it worked superbly" (Krepinevich, p. 174). According to John Nagl CAP success was significant, and in 1967 the only regions in which the communists did

not increase control of villages were in areas where CAP's were operating (p. 197). Nagl states that there were other indicators of success in CAP villages that demonstrate a weakening of Viet Cong influence. According to Nagl, the fact that formal communist network functions of tax and food collection were damaged by CAP operations and the extent to which road traffic and market attendance significantly increased also demonstrated that CAP's were becoming very effective (Nagl, p. 198).

Regardless of the success that CAP achieved, the Army did everything possible to discourage the spread of this method of pacification. Comments from General Harry Kinnard, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, sum up the opinion the Army had about the CAP's:

Absolutely disgusted...I did everything I could to drag them out and get them to fight...They don't know how to fight on land, particularly against guerrillas (Krepinevich, p. 175).

MACV Commander General William Westmoreland disagreed with the CAP concept and felt that the Marines should "have been trying to find the enemy's main forces and bring them to battle" and that the Marines were so infatuated with civic action that "they have been hesitant to conduct offensive operations" (Nagl, p. 197). One final example of the Army ignoring the success of the CAP's is the experience that British Brigadier General Kenneth Hunt, an insurgent warfare expert from the International Institute of Strategic Studies, had upon visiting MACV after reviewing the CAP program. Hunt was impressed with CAP and realized that the "Marines had not been able to sell the idea to the rest of the Americans" (Krepinevich, p. 175). When Hunt tried to express this to MACV in Saigon, the American reaction was that the Marines had "brainwashed" him

into becoming a believer in the program and then MACV discounted the program as “too expensive” (Krepinevich, p. 175).

Similar to the Army pacification methods in the Philippines, the CIDG also implemented traditional counterinsurgency strategy of bolstering the security of the populace, separating the guerrillas from them, and utilizing popular forces to defend their own villages. Created by the CIA and executed by the Army Special Forces, the CIDG program was an “unqualified success” by which “Several hundred square miles of Vietnam...were secured from Viet Cong infiltration or control”(Adams, p. 86). John Nagl considers the CIDG program to have achieved “demonstrable results in a comparably short time, and with relatively few resources expended”, but the Army was unable to learn from the success of this program either (p. 170). According to Krepinevich, the CIDG was an absolute success in the adoption of classic counterinsurgency techniques: it utilized roughly thirty eight thousand irregular forces to reclaim several hundred villages, over three hundred thousand civilians, and several hundred square miles of territory from Viet Cong control (p. 71).

Although the program was a success, the Army leadership was wary of the close relationship between the CIA and Special Forces, and the CIDG operation did not fit within the parameters of the firepower and maneuver-based Army Concept. As a result, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Maxwell Taylor, reviewed the CIDG program, determining that the Special Forces were being used incorrectly and that they should have more participation in offensive operations (Krepinevich, p. 71). The Army instituted Operation Switchback that was designed to transfer control of the CIDG program from the CIA to the Army, and the result was a “collapse of the pacification program in those

areas in which the Special Forces had been operating" (Krepinevich, p. 75). The Special Forces Command in Vietnam had protested this change in the CIDG program both in Washington and in Vietnam, but the arguments fell on deaf ears and the program continued to drastically deteriorate (Adams, p. 89). Having changed the role of the CIDG from a village defense organization comprised of personnel who lived in the village, and therefore had a vested interest in the success of the program, to a conventional infantry unit waging war far from its home village, MACV effectively ended any successes that it had gained.

Recommendations for adopting changes in strategy were similarly ignored or brushed aside in Vietnam. In contrast to Lieutenant William Johnston's experience with his report on the insurgent infrastructure having resonated throughout the Army of the Philippines and thus contributing directly to a change in US strategy, several warnings which were offered by authorities within the Department of State (DOS) regarding the Army's conventional approach were ignored as the Johnson Administration moved forward with the third—or conventional—phase of the war. The head of the DOS Policy Planning Council, Robert Johnson, as well as Thomas Hughes, the director of Intelligence and Research at the DOS, warned that the Viet Cong would not conduct the war in accordance with the Army Concept. They reported that "the need, as always, was to provide security to the population" and that the "oil spot principle was still the key to victory" (Krepinevich, p. 161). Robert Johnson recommended that the role of US ground forces should be limited and that "under no circumstances should we be committed to major participation" (Krepinevich, p. 160). In contrast to Arthur MacArthur's acceptance of Johnston's report in the Philippines, President Johnson, instead of considering the

DOS recommendation, proved unwilling to deviate from the plan that he had already committed to for how the US should fight to save South Vietnam

Not only did the State Department recommend strategic changes in the approach to the war in Vietnam, the Army also generated several internal reports that recommended similar changes. Recall the above-mentioned Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN), the 1966 Army-commissioned study, which argued that the war must be fought at the village level in order to convince the peasants to support the government of Vietnam, and concluded that the keys to success were in fact programs such as CIDG and CAP (Nagl, p. 200). Beyond such programs the US approach was repudiated in this study, which also argued that the key to success was the integration of security forces with the populace on a long-term basis.

Although this report was an internal Army study, it did not gain concurrence from the Army hierarchy. The Army Chief of Staff, General Harold Johnson, did not permit discussion of the study outside of the Army Staff, and General Westmoreland recommended that it be downgraded to a “conceptual study” for use only in developing concepts at the National Security Council (Nagl, p. 201). The study was effectively suppressed to the point that its impact on the Army Concept was negligible. Nagl characterizes Westmoreland’s reaction as an attempt to avoid an assault on his authority, and describes these obstructive tactics as responsible for the Army missing its best chance to reform its flawed strategy.

In addition to the PROVN study, General Creighton Abrams, successor to General Westmoreland as commander of the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam,

authored the paper “One War: MACV Command Overview 1968-72” in which he proposed a change in overall US strategy in Vietnam. Having been one of the authors of the PROVN study, he now had the unique opportunity to change MACV strategy and make significant progress against the enemy. Much like Johnston’s methods in the Philippines, Abrams’ current plan included focusing on the Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI) and not on attrition-based warfare, acknowledging that “The enemy Main Forces and NVA are blind without the VCI” (Nagl, p. 215). The criterion for success under Abram’s new plan was population security not the body count, and security was “the functional reason for the US to be here” (Krepinevich, p. 254). The report closed by stating that it was essential for the Viet Cong to demonstrate to the populace that the government could not provide them security, and that they have succeeded in doing so.

Although Abram’s strategy was clearly appropriate and necessary for any hope of success in Vietnam, the Army bureaucracy that was so fixated on making the Army Concept succeed in Vietnam sidetracked the strategy. Even though Abrams directed that the change in strategy occur, there was minimal change in how the units in the field operated. The attrition-based strategy was so ingrained in Army operations by this time that at all levels there was still the “kill VC” focus, and even in Abrams’ headquarters his staff was not converted (Krepinevich, p. 255). Finally, the Army Chief of Staff himself betrayed his desire to continue with the current strategy of maneuver-based warfare when he responded to the study by stating that,

We still must maintain the basic position that the Army is a fighting force and that our success is measured in terms of leaders’ or commanders’ ability to command US troops effectively and not put the emphasis on the advisor in the field (Nagl, p. 216).

A final example of the failure of the Army to implement change based upon successful programs or recommendations from people within the organization is to be found in the “advisor revolt”. Prior to the large-scale commitment of conventional forces in 1965, the primary US military effort in the country consisted of several hundred Lieutenants, Captains, Majors, and Colonels scattered throughout the country, advising units within the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). These officers were on the cutting edge of the conflict and had the most accurate perspective on how MACV’s counterinsurgency effort was proceeding. In contrast to the glowing reports submitted to Washington by the MACV headquarters, the advisors were submitting reports to their superiors in Saigon that described a very different situation. The advisors reported poor ARVN leadership that lacked initiative, and tactics that inflicted the most punishment on the civilian populace. Nonetheless, these reports fell on deaf ears in the Army bureaucracy in Saigon. In at least one case such a report was ordered destroyed, further compelling the frustrated advisors to turn to the press or to bypass MACV headquarters and attempt to get the truth out to the Army Staff directly. Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann’s efforts to tell the true story about MACV’s counterinsurgency operation were emblematic of the approach adopted by many of the US advisors serving in Vietnam early in the conflict. Within the Army his claims that the ARVN unit he advised intentionally operated only in areas known to be free of enemy forces were discounted, as were his descriptions of their operations as “walks in the sun” (Krepinevich, p. 78). Vann and several other officers were critical of the poor performance of the ARVN as well as the harsh effect that their tactics had on the civilian populace. Other problems reported by Vann were the “haphazard method of implementation” of the Strategic Hamlet Program,

and he recommended that the “oil spot” principle be employed because the current methods were certain to lead to a communist victory (Krepinevich, p. 83).

As will be seen in the following chapter, advisors in El Salvador eventually received the attention they deserved, in contrast to advisors in Vietnam. In Vietnam this lack of attention given to feedback from advisors in the field was discouraging, especially since many of the reports were “sanitized and pigeon-holed” by the MACV staff in Saigon (Krepinevich, p. 82). Despite the criticism from advisors, MACV continued to claim success and predict a quick end to the conflict. Even the Joint Staff in Washington refused to receive a briefing from Vann on MACV’s counterinsurgency operations from his perspective as an advisor in the field; members of the staff who shared the optimistic view of the war being reported by MACV sidetracked his efforts. This behavior by the Army’s hierarchy clearly demonstrated its unwillingness to deviate from the conventional concept that it felt compelled to follow regardless of the situation on the ground. Many advisors were reporting failures in strategy and tactics, but the Army was able to discount this as the “product of a disaffected few” (Krepinevich, p. 81). The Army “blocked or ignored the negative reports submitted by the advisors” as well as “eliminated, in part, the source of dissent” by compelling several senior advisors to retire and one, John Paul Vann, to quit the service in disgust (Krepinevich, p. 84). Because of the Army’s optimistic, but blind, approach to a strategy from which it refused to deviate, any negative reports from an advisor reflected poorly on that advisor’s performance; the officers who did not follow the party line found their careers in jeopardy.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Although leaders in the Philippines permitted subordinates to innovate and then accepted their recommendations for changes in strategy, there are many examples from the Vietnam War of key figures not accepting input and innovation that did not meet the conventional Army Concept for waging war. By ignoring programs like CIDG and CAP, reports from respected diplomatic and military leaders, and direct feedback from the personnel in the field who were directly involved, the Army missed innumerable opportunities to alter the course of the counterinsurgency war in Vietnam.

Compounding the Army's institutional failure to learn on the spot was the failure of its institutional memory. After all, the US had waged counterinsurgency warfare earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with significant success. Yet the lessons to be learned from the Philippines at the turn of the century had little to no impact on US counterinsurgency methods in Vietnam. Just one decade after the Vietnam War ended, the US would face yet another counterinsurgency test closer to its borders. El Salvador was the next proving ground for US doctrine and methods. Would the counterinsurgency leadership in this case accept input to its methods and allow for change in its approach to the conflict?

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## IV. EL SALVADOR

### A. INTRODUCTION

The case of El Salvador provides an interesting and relatively recent example of American counterinsurgency efforts. American efforts in El Salvador are similar to those in the Philippines and Vietnam in the respect that they were all decentralized counterinsurgency operations. But the case of counterinsurgency in El Salvador can also be considered unique in the sense that individual American officers and non-commissioned officers operated independently, advising one or more indigenous battalion or brigade sized maneuver elements. In the Philippines and Vietnam, US forces actually conducted the counterinsurgency operations, in addition to advising and leading indigenous forces. In contrast, in El Salvador the actual conduct of counterinsurgency operations was the responsibility of the El Salvadorans (Bacevich, 1985, p.v).

The institutional reporting system, which constituted the formal feedback mechanism during the conflict, provided filtered information necessary for the American embassy military liaison group (MILGP) to remain informed about advisors' activities, El Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) developments, and the general progress of the war. Several informal feedback mechanisms provided detailed ground truth information and analysis of issues, events, techniques, and procedures that individual advisors were successfully or unsuccessfully employing in their respective areas of responsibility (AOR).

Though the formal mechanism constituted a necessary channel for general information, it was the informal mechanisms that ensured the advisory effort sustained its overall effectiveness throughout the twelve year conflict as will be seen. And ultimately,

it was the deliberate merging of the two systems under a dynamic leader that made a significant contribution to the successful conclusion of the insurgency.

## B. BACKGROUND ON AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

American efforts in El Salvador's conflict from 1979 to 1992 are easily understood as having evolved in three phases. Phase one was the early war period. In phase two there was a period of military stalemate. The third phase consisted of protracted negotiations. Throughout the conflict, the mission of the US Military Group in El Salvador was to provide assistance as necessary to improve the ESAF's human rights record and ensure that the ESAF did not suffer defeat at the hands of the insurgent forces (Waghelstein, 1985, p.34).

The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), an umbrella organization incorporating all five major armed insurgent groups and their aligned political wings, constituted a grave threat to the ESAF and, consequently, the government of El Salvador (GOES) (Haggerty, 1990, pp.40-41; Waghelstein, p. A-1 to A-4). The ascendancy of the FMLN militarily and politically characterized the early war period (Manwarring, 1988, p.xiv). Although members of the MILGP and selected individuals were advising the ESAF prior to the reformist coup in October 1979, the American advisory effort began in earnest with the deployment of mobile training teams (MTT) in March of 1981, following the resumption of United States military aid in the wake of the insurgents' January 1981 "final offensive" (Haggerty, p.224). Throughout the war the vast majority of field advisors were SF personnel, and during the latter period of the war many of the NCOs serving in the field were drawn from the cadres of teams originally sent as TDY advisors from 3/7<sup>th</sup> SFG(A) during the early war period (Scruggs, p.5).

The first phase of the advisory effort focused on staving off the defeat of the government by the insurgents through an influx of massive American military assistance in the guise of funding, training, and equipping an expanding ESAF in order “to fight a successful counterinsurgency campaign” (Waghelstein, p.34). During this period much of the responsibility for the in-country advisory effort was undertaken by Special Forces (SF) detachments and selected individuals from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group (Airborne) operating out of Panama (“Interview: Special Forces in El Salvador,” October 1993). Detachments or individuals operated on temporary duty in El Salvador lasting up to six months (Pedrozo, April 2001). The in-country advisory effort was conducted in a decentralized manner during this phase, with advisory elements conducting specific missions while having limited reporting requirements to the MILGP (Scruggs, 1996, p.1; Hazlewood, April 2001; Pedrozo).

Communications between teams on advisory duty and the MILGP were limited, generally taking the form of situation reports (SITREPs) and after action reports (AARs) following the completion of duties in-country. The vast majority of information flowing to the MILGP came through informal channels, primarily in the guise of “cross talk” between advisors in the field and visits to and from the MILGP (Hazlewood).

The second phase of the conflict, characterized as a period of military stalemate, lasted from 1984 to 1989 (McMullen, April 2001). During this period, the effects of American assistance in terms of tactical and operational level training, expansion of the ESAF, and increased material capabilities began to reverse the trend of insurgent dominance. The FMLN did not have the firepower and manpower to defeat the ESAF on the battlefield or the public support to oust the GOES through political maneuvering,

while GOES and the ESAF recognized their inability to destroy the FMLN as a political or fighting force and effectively ceded portions of the populace and territory to the insurgents. The second phase saw the advisory effort evolve into a more permanent structure with individual officers and non-commissioned officers assigned for one-year tours to the MILGP for field advisor duty with the ESAF (Pedrozo). Communications between the advisors and the MILGP became more formalized during this period (Hazlewood).

The third phase, referred to as the period of negotiations, saw the insurgents conduct a series of negotiations with the GOES beginning in 1989 and eventually leading to the termination of hostilities in February 1992 (Montgomery, 1995, pp.213-225). During this final phase of the conflict, the advisory effort reorganized to ensure that each military district and its local ESAF units had an American assigned to monitor the conduct of operations. Throughout the stalemate period, the military advisory effort took on a different role, with less emphasis placed on providing tactical advice to the ESAF combat formations and greater emphasis placed on monitoring the professionalism of those formations (Hazlewood). Formal communication between field advisors and the MILGP was at its height during this period.

In contrast to efforts during the latter half of the war in Vietnam, the United States did not use an overwhelming conventional military approach in El Salvador to resolve the communist insurgent threat (Bacevich, 1988, p.v). Because of Congressional opposition to increasing US intervention the Army had no choice but to follow a limited military strategy focused on counterinsurgency. Congressional pressure on the executive branch led to a self-imposed 55 man limit on the number of American military advisors that

could work at any time in the country ("Interview: Special Forces in El Salvador," p.36).

The limited approach applied in El Salvador is ironic, particularly considering the Army's post-Vietnam aversion to counterinsurgency.

Although the MILGP advisory organization remained flexible throughout the conflict in order to meet the changing needs of the situation in El Salvador, during the latter half of the war the organization began to develop a more permanent structure as field advisors rotated in on year-long tours. The term OPATT (Operations and Training Teams) was used to designate the field advisor effort (Waghelstein, p.53). Assignment of these permanent field advisors paralleled the ESAF's command structure. Each military department had an NCO assigned as an advisor, while a field grade officer was assigned to advise each of the six brigade headquarters. Brigade advisors were originally intended as LTC positions, but were changed to MAJ and CPT billets with the LTCs filling positions at the MILGP (Scruggs, p.5). Unlike the ESAF, in which each of the department commanders and brigades commanders operated independently, the US advisors followed a more formal chain of command with each brigade advisor having one or more NCOs reporting to him and each brigade advisor reporting to the MILGP's Senior OPATT (normally a LTC) serving directly under the MILGP CDR (Andrade, March 2001; Rothstein, April 2001). In addition to the OPATTs, the MILGP provided advisors to the ESAF's national military headquarters, which simultaneously functioned as a strategic and operational command center (Pedrozo). These national level advisors often were dual-hatted, serving as MILGP staff members in addition to performing advisory duties (Pedrozo).

## **C. INFORMAL FEEDBACK IN EL SALVADOR**

Informal mechanisms of feedback consisted of all manner of communications outside the institutional reporting system. Informal communications not only supported the diffusion of ideas between advisors in the field, but also the exchange of information between advisors and the MILGP commander and staff. In addition to feedback among MILGP personnel, information flowed outside of the formal reporting cycle directly to senior American policy makers during the course of numerous briefings provided by advisors in the field to visiting dignitaries.

### **1. A Small Pool to Draw From**

Informal feedback flourished in El Salvador for several reasons. For one, the necessity for an extensive formal preparation system was precluded given the small number of personnel available to conduct advisory duties and the fact that the vast majority of the field advisors were drawn from the same unit and served repetitive tours in El Salvador (particularly the noncommissioned officers). The most significant advantage of having a small pool of manpower concentrated in the same command was that previous first hand experience not only proved the best preparation for an advisor but also provided the MILGP with an immediately effective advisor in contrast to an inexperienced individual who would require weeks or months to acquire the experience and skills necessary to become a truly effective advisor.

Also, the fact that a small number of very dedicated, professional men, all of whom spoke Spanish, had regional expertise, were drawn from the same command, and executed repetitive advisory tours ensured that an institutional memory was sustained among the field advisors throughout the conflict and eliminated the necessity of

implementing formal predeployment procedures (Pedrozo, Rothstein). Most of these men personally knew each other from service in Special Forces or the advisory effort (Sepp, April 2001; Pedrozo, Rothstein, Hazlewood). Their close relationships mitigated many of the social and cultural barriers to communication associated with developing interpersonal relationships among coworkers (Pedrozo). Advisors in El Salvador thus had no problem communicating informally with one another. They routinely offered each other advice, ideas, and exchanged opinions regarding their advisory efforts (Pedrozo, Andrade, Rothstein, Hazlewood, McMullen, Sepp). Advisors regularly communicated via telephone, radio, and very often in person, flying from one advisor's station to another to view first-hand the efforts of peers (McMullen). Humorously referred to as "repeat offenders" (Pedrozo), these men lent consistency to the advisory effort as well as providing it with a built-in institutional memory.

A prime example of how the advisors effectively communicated can be seen in the development of the Regional Intelligence Center (RIC) Program. The RIC program was a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) initiative (Trumble, March 2001; Pedrozo). Due to manpower shortages, the CIA in El Salvador was unable to have agency personnel assigned to the RICs on a permanent basis (Rothstein, Sepp). CIA "circuit riders" were available for only a few days each month at any given RIC and were unable to effectively advise the ESAF on intelligence operations (McMullen). To solve the manpower problem the CIA turned to the Department of Defense which directed that the Army provide military intelligence officers to man the RICs. But after only one rotation of RIC advisors the MI branch was exhausted of qualified Spanish-speaking officers. Next, the Army turned to the Special Forces community to provide Spanish speaking intelligence

personnel. Most of the intelligence sergeants who manned the RICs came from the same source as the field advisors: namely the Special Forces community (“Interview: Special Forces in El Salvador,” p.36).

The original RIC program developed by the CIA was focused not on developing intelligence for Brigade and lower level combat formations, but for the ESAF national command, and more importantly, CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia (McMullen). Thus, the initial RIC effort provided little assistance to the American field advisors or the elements they advised (Pedrozo). With the rotation of Special Forces personnel into the RIC advisory positions, an informal method for exchanging important intelligence now existed , which lent additional credibility to the advisor in the eyes of the Salvadorans because of his access to intelligence needed for planning combat operations (McMullen).

## **2. Civil Defense**

Designed to protect local inhabitants and their property against depredations by insurgents, and to serve as an early warning system and a grass roots intelligence service for government forces, indigenous civil defense units are considered a significant component in counterinsurgency doctrine. Much like advisors during the Vietnam War, Americans involved in El Salvador’s civil war noted the need for the development of a civil defense (CD) program. As the 1984 Kissinger Commission on Latin America report stated “local popular militia must be formed throughout the country to prevent the insurgents from using terror to extract obedience” (McClintok, 1992, p. 251).

Although opinions differ regarding the overall effectiveness of the civil defense program in El Salvador as a security force, two points are clear. The program’s implementation was initially a one-man effort (Manwaring, p. 309; Pedrozo) and the

program had beneficial unintended consequences (Manwaring, p. 337-338; Rothstein).

In 1983, before the Kissinger report was published, the CD program in El Salvador had been initiated by an American military advisor, a Sergeant First Class (SFC) at the time named Bruce Hazlewood. The intent for civil defense was to provide security to the local populace and infrastructure, free up ESAF forces to conduct offensive operations, and tie the rural population to the GOES (Byrne, 1996, p.79; Bacevich, p.40).

When interviewed, Hazlewood explained he encountered two obstacles upon initiating the CD program. The first was to convince indigenous Salvadorans that the CD program was not a rebirth of the feared Organization for Democracy (ORDEN) paramilitary apparatus that was historically associated with oppression of the general population (Bacevich, 1988, p.40). After overcoming the stigma associated with ORDEN, Hazlewood said he next had to keep the American chain of command from pushing the program beyond its limits, as had been done with the CIDG during the Vietnam War, and from having the program quashed by an ESAF fearful of providing arms to a suspect population. “From the beginning it was decided to keep civil defense very low key.” Essentially, Hazlewood had to keep the program from languishing out of Salvadoran indifference or collapsing from American over-eagerness (Interview, April 2001).

Hazlewood had wide latitude in the execution of his duties. This latitude allowed him at times to overcome the obstacles facing CD. As a ground rule, Hazlewood could turn away potential Salvadoran CD personnel from his training camp in San Juan Opico if he deemed them unfit, either because of their background as former ORDEN members or for physical and mental deficiencies (Hazlewood). After completing the CD training

course, these cadres were sent back to teach CD techniques to other volunteers in their home areas (Pedrozo, Rothstein). Once the CD unit had attained a requisite number of members and level of training, Hazlewood would arrive and conduct an inspection to "certify" that the unit had met all the requirements necessary to be issued weapons (Hazlewood). At this point Hazlewood navigated around the second obstacle. Instead of issuing state of the art assault rifles and support weapons, he provided M1 carbines in order to implicitly limit the role the CD units could play. With their firepower limited in this way it was unlikely American planners would be motivated to push the ESAF to employ the CD units as offensive elements, which had been the fate of CIDG elements during Vietnam. At the same time, these weapons would also not raise alarm within the ESAF, which was extremely sensitive about arming the general population.

As the number of CD units grew, COL Jim Roach, the senior OPATT (and twice a former brigade field advisor), began to send field advisors to San Juan Opico to learn about the CD program first-hand (Pedrozo). This was similar to how GEN MacArthur used LT William Johnston during the Philippines Insurrection, where, in the village of Tiaon, he instructed various American officers on his methods for conducting counterinsurgency operations. After meeting with Hazlewood, field advisors began to take over the certification and inspection processes (Pedrozo). A recurring duty of designated field advisors was to conduct periodic inspections of CD units in their area of responsibility (Rothstein). Advisors ensured that each unit remained actively employed in civil defense activities, accounted for and inspected the serviceability of weapons, acted as a check against any inclination of CD members to abuse their power (a significant

grievance against ORDEN members), and also reinforced the training and motivation of the local garrisons (Rothstein).

The CD program is a good illustration of how informal feedback was involved in a very significant program in the El Salvadoran counterinsurgency effort. SGM(R) Hazlewood was given simple instructions from the commander to implement the program. Beginning with a single advisor, minimal material resources and few indigenous personnel, the program grew to include a number of field advisors and thousands of Salvadorans. Whether CD was operationally successful in dissuading attacks by the FMLN is not clear, but without question this program - developed and run in an informal manner - had an important strategic impact far beyond the manpower or material expended, in part simply because it compelled the Salvadorans to publicly side with the government (Rothstein).

Informal communications in El Salvador took other forms. For example, two NCOs conceived the idea of producing a training film for the ESAF (Trumble). The intent of the film was to teach effective counterinsurgency patrolling techniques by comparing and contrasting two combat patrols (Sepp). The first patrol portrays an unprepared, unprofessional group that fails to achieve its objective and, in the process of the operation, commits human rights violations. The second patrol portrays the opposite by exemplifying professionalism and proper preparation and execution of the operation. After the concept was presented, the US Southern Command had the film produced by a film company and the movie, "Dos Patrullas" became a useful training aid used during the rapid expansion of the ESAF during the war (Rothstein).

The high profile nature of American involvement in El Salvador's conflict ensured that a steady stream of political and military dignitaries from the United States visited the country. In addition to meeting with El Salvadoran officials, many of these dignitaries met with field advisors to gather first-hand accounts or "ground truth" about the conduct of the war. Many military personnel typically regard visits by VIPs as a nuisance or distraction, but, in the case of El Salvador these visits actually provided an important mechanism for informal communication (Waghelstein, p. 50). After visiting field advisors, many dignitaries returned to Washington or their command with a much greater appreciation for the nature of the war in El Salvador, the complexities of implementing US national policies, and the overall progress of events that could never have been gained through more formal, less direct mechanisms (McMullen).

#### **D. FORMAL FEEDBACK IN EL SALVADOR**

There were no formal reporting requirements from advisors at the beginning of the war beyond standard information briefings conducted by TDY personnel for the MILGP CDR and his staff upon their arrival in-country and again prior to departure (Hazlewood). With the transition from Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) to individual advisors permanently assigned to ESAF units the MILGP implemented an institutional reporting system which was continuously employed throughout the latter portion of the conflict. This primarily consisted of a monthly written report filed by each Brigade Advisor detailing the activities of his supported ESAF units and the major activities of each advisor in the Brigade Advisor's AOR (Andrade, McMullen, Pedrozo, Rothstein, Sepp).

A three-day Advisors Conference held in the capital, San Salvador, followed up the monthly reports. These conferences had originated in the first phase of the advisory effort as a monthly briefing held in San Salvador by the MILGP staff to keep permanent and TDY personnel informed of developments throughout the zone of conflict (Hazlewood). The composition of the written report and advisors conference changed to match the priorities, preferences, and idiosyncrasies of each different MILGP commander (Andrade, Rothstein, Sepp). According to former field advisors, in many instances the reports acted more as a tool for the MILGP to monitor and control the activities of the field advisors than as a mechanism for monitoring or tracking the status of the ESAF or FMLN. COL(R) John McMullen believed the reports were primarily a method for administratively evaluating individual advisors (April 2001). SGM (R) Hazlewood stated that the reporting procedures became a means for the MILGP to gain tight control over the advisors and this 'control by report' technique often had a negative effect on the morale of the field advisors (April 2001).

To prove the point about how little the monthly reports meant in terms of advising, informing the MILGP, or coordinating the advisory effort, COL(R) Hy Rothstein stated that at one point in his tour of duty as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade advisor (1988 to 1989), he intentionally did not mail a monthly report or attend the monthly advisors' conference. According to Rothstein, he never received any response or questions from the MILGP for either of these omissions. He concluded that the reporting system was ineffective during his tenure as an advisor.

As another example of the lack of value placed on the reporting system, COL Andrade stated that, initially, during his tour of duty (April 1990 to April 1991), advisors

referred to the three-day advisor's meeting as 'R &R', and did not consider it a serious effort to conduct business. Additionally, Andrade explained there was never a standardized format for the reports or briefings until the spring of 1990 when the senior OPATT, LTC Dietrichs, in an effort to achieve greater uniformity in the quality of reporting, dictated that a specific format be followed by the advisors (April 2001).

#### **E. HAMILTON'S TELESCOPE: A COMBINED APPROACH**

During the Vietnam War, the Army missed an opportunity for making a change in strategy when GEN Abrams replaced GEN Westmoreland as MACV commander. In contrast, the Army in El Salvador flourished under new leadership. In the third phase of the war, the arrival of COL Mark Hamilton as the MIL GP CDR in September of 1990 heralded a significant change in the command environment. Hamilton, a field artillery officer, initiated his command with a thorough tour of El Salvador, meeting with each of his subordinates in his area of responsibility. Hamilton was able to talk with each advisor and personally observe them in their work settings. Hamilton was highly impressed with the men and felt they represented the cutting edge of America's counterinsurgency efforts (telephone interview, 9 April 2001). According to Hamilton, he developed a unique bond with the field advisors, which began with his initial impressions of the men he met in the field "living day in and day out with the ESAF and very often in harm's way." He further stated, "The dedication, professionalism, and courage displayed by each advisor I met during that initial tour provided me a strong sense of admiration for these men and this admiration only grew stronger as my tour progressed" (9 April 2001).

Before he arrived in El Salvador, Hamilton recognized that his lack of personal experience in El Salvador made him terribly dependent on the insights of others. Hamilton's attitude is in marked contrast to that of senior Army leadership in Vietnam who failed to recognize their own experiential weaknesses in conducting counterinsurgency operations. With his initial country tour Hamilton began to build a bridge of trust with the field advisors whom he realized would be the ones to provide him insights on the ESAF and the war.

Hamilton's initial trip also confirmed two things. First, it would be terribly impractical for him to conduct regular tours of the country to meet directly with each advisor in his assigned AO, particularly with the many other duties assigned to him as the MILGP CDR. Hamilton said, "I would have spent my entire tour of duty in the air flying from cuartel to cuartel and I would have had to neglect all my other myriad of duties". Second, Hamilton needed to incorporate the knowledge and experience of the field advisors into his decision-making process as the MILGP CDR. "I was thoroughly dependent on the OPATTs to provide me detailed information and analysis. It would have been extremely naïve for me not to incorporate subordinate feedback into my decision making process."

Upon returning to San Salvador, Hamilton initiated changes to the status reporting system and the monthly advisors' conference. Monthly reports no longer reflected the MILGP CDR's priorities, but conveyed each Brigade Advisor Team's assessment of the actual situation in his area of responsibility (Andrade). The advisors conferences assumed a greater role then just informing the chain of command of actions taken, but in addition became a series of coordination meetings. Thus, not only vertical integration was

achieved between senior and subordinates, but also the meetings facilitated lateral integration of efforts among advisors. Similar to US counterinsurgency efforts in the Philippines, the MILGP CDR's priorities began to be set based not only on his own intuition, but given the analysis provided by the field advisors, particularly the NCOs working in each of the country's military departments (Andrade).

The leadership approach which Hamilton used to gather and analyze feedback from field advisors, staff, and higher command is best described as that of a directed telescope (VanCreveld, 1985, p.75). The directed telescope method uses informal communications to supplement the information gathered through formal mechanisms. The formal feedback came through the monthly reports, which provided Hamilton the raw data that, after analysis, identified critical issues or areas of interest to focus on at the advisors' conferences. But then, as noted earlier, the conferences also quickly evolved into interactive problem-solving sessions involving Hamilton, his staff *and* the field advisors.

During the first year of Hamilton's tour as CDR, reports from the advisors, coupled with official ESAF documents, led Hamilton to believe there was a significant problem with the conduct of ESAF operations. According to the data he reviewed, the ESAF was saturating the countryside with hundreds of small unit patrols, a classic counterinsurgency tactic. This had been emphasized as crucial to the war effort by US advisors throughout the conflict. But suddenly, to Hamilton, small unit operations seemed to send the wrong message. Thousands of man-hours were being expended yet were failing to produce significant results. During the conduct of an advisors conference and in consultation with his subordinates, Hamilton decided that the time was right for the

ESAF to reorient to an emphasis on large (Battalion and higher) level operations, especially since the FMLN had been observed operating in larger formations (Andrade). The result was that resources being expended on developing an American style NCO corps and teaching small unit tactics were reoriented to conducting larger scale operations. The ESAF began to show significant increases in the number of engagements it had with, and the number of casualties inflicted upon, the FMLN.

Although never repeating his initial country tour, Hamilton made periodic visits to observe field advisors and gather first-hand information. On one such trip to visit COL (then MAJ) Kalev Sepp, Hamilton exploited feedback from Sepp for the benefit of Salvadoran soldiers and the ESAF in general. While visiting a small arms range with Sepp and his assigned ESAF unit, Hamilton asked Sepp why so many of the Salvadorans seemed to be poor marksmen based on their widely dispersed shot groups. Sepp explained to Hamilton that many of the Salvadorans had naturally poor eyesight and the ESAF failed to identify these individuals and provide them glasses to compensate for the problem. At the next meeting with the ESAF high command, Hamilton brought up the issue of poor eyesight up and asked why the ESAF did not have any procedures for screening recruits' vision and then providing them with adequate eyewear. The response was that the ESAF had never considered its recruits' eyesight. After Hamilton explained the tremendous benefits of providing such a basic service to its soldiers, and the fact that a screening and eyeglass program was extremely inexpensive, the ESAF implemented a vision program. According to Sepp, the overall effectiveness of ESAF units increased and, as an unintended consequence, the ESAF and GOES as institutions gained greater legitimacy as individual soldiers and their families were provided with a simple but

effective government service that tremendously improved the quality of their lives beyond just their period of service (Sepp).

In addition to identifying and solving potential operational problems, COL Hamilton also used the feedback he received from his subordinates to check the veracity of reports produced by the senior Salvadoran military leaders for the American ambassador and his own Military Assistance Group. Hamilton quickly recognized that the reports often failed to accurately assess the ESAF's effectiveness, and was able to use this information as leverage to force the ESAF to meet US expectations. In reverse, Hamilton noted that American advisors in the field, acting in their capacity as human rights advisors/monitors, not only influenced ESAF elements to not commit human rights violations, they also provided invaluable service as 'honest brokers', ensuring that ESAF units were not falsely accused of violations (Hamilton).

In sum then, what we see is that as the war progressed, the reporting system evolved from relatively tightly focused SITREPs produced by MTTs strictly reporting facts regarding the status of their particular training activities to a product that offered detailed personal assessments of ESAF activities and their results, the status of civil-military cooperation, and other relevant conditions in the field. The advisors conference also developed from back briefs by the MILGP staff to a forum where advisors could exchange ideas and coordinate efforts with the staff and other advisors. The combination of these developments created a more supple formal mechanism which, although never eclipsing the informal mechanisms of communication, provided a much more useful tool for coordination of advisory efforts throughout the country (Andrade).

Under Hamilton, the formal reporting system ultimately provided the institutional information necessary to keep the commander and his staff informed of institutional procedures necessary to monitoring the status of the advisory effort. But also when reviewed in conjunction with informal feedback provided by the field advisors, this formal reporting system provided information to make insightful analysis possible. As Martin VanCreveld states in *Command in War*, an institutional reporting system provides the commander the information necessary to identify what additional information he needs to make critical decisions and where to look for it, but that same system is unlikely to provide the critical information needed to take decisive action (p.273). This phenomenon was also seen in the Philippines case, where the commander, GEN Arthur MacArthur, possessed a good understanding of the situation and problems his forces faced. The detailed report from LT Johnston confirmed MacArthur's beliefs and provided a framework for approaching problems encountered during the counterinsurgency campaign. The leadership approach taken Hamilton and MacArthur is in sharp contrast with that of American leaders during the Vietnam War who often ignored critical information presented to them formally and informally that could, would, and should have contributed to a decision to change US strategy for the better.

#### F. COUNTERINSURGENCY IN EL SALVADOR: SUCCESS OR FAILURE

In terms of the objectives of the United States, the counterinsurgency campaign in El Salvador was a success (Rosello, 1993, p.102). The principal evidence for this success is that the armed insurgent threat to the GOES has ended. Although not decisively defeated militarily, the FMLN negotiated a settlement to the conflict that did not earn them power over the state's governmental apparatus. The GOES made significant

reforms in order to ensure the end of hostilities and these reforms, although not achieving complete democracy, made the government more responsive to and representative of the population than at any time in El Salvadoran history (Montgomery, p.226). Finally, the ESAF was molded into a more professional and effective military force, less tolerant of human rights violations and unbridled corruption (Hamilton, 1992, p.40).

Without a doubt, the most telling evidence of the effectiveness of the American advisory effort was provided by FMLN leaders themselves (Pedrezo). During the final peace negotiations with the government, the FMLN insisted that American advisors continue to be stationed with ESAF units following the cessation of hostilities (“Interview: Special Forces in El Salvador, p.38). The FMLN representatives stated that the presence of US advisors forced the ESAF to function more professionally, and that this additional level of professionalism dramatically decreased the number of unprovoked violent incidents involving the ESAF (Rosello, p.105; Andrade, McMullen, Pedrozo, Rothstein, Sepp).

## **G. CONCLUSION**

The American advisory effort in El Salvador illustrates the evolution of a counterinsurgency campaign from an effort involving a series of disparate training teams focused strictly on training individual ESAF combat units to an all encompassing, coordinated operation that not only advised and monitored all major ESAF combat formations, but also contributed to the ultimately successful termination of the conflict (Rosello, Winter 1993, p. 105). The evolution of the advisory effort illustrates the value of informal feedback mechanisms in the conduct of protracted conflicts, particularly the impact of institutional memory. In El Salvador, this came in the guise of repetitive tours

by competent, dedicated individuals who remained in contact with each other throughout the period of the conflict (Pedrozo, Rothstein). As with MacArthur's appreciation for LT Johnston's insights, El Salvador exemplifies the power of the application of a directed telescope by a senior key leader. Additionally, the case highlights the value to be gained when a leader utilizes information drawn through both the institutional reporting system and informal channels to effectively unify the efforts of the entire command by adopting innovations and priorities developed from subordinates in the field.

Some of the specific reasons for the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms and the influence they had on the progress of the advisory effort in El Salvador include the limited number of personnel and small amount of resources committed (Pedrozo). In such a small community every member of the advisory effort became a critical node in the chain of information and their feedback was necessary for the MILGP CDR, his staff and high-level officials in achieving a broader understanding of the status of the war (Andrade). Senior field advisors responsible for advising one ESAF brigade and staff (and often battalion commanders) were forced to rely on their subordinates for ground truth in the same manner that the MILGP CDR relied on the field advisors for information to make effective decisions (Andrade; Hamilton, April 2001). Another factor supporting the effectiveness of American efforts related to the limited number of advisors was the fact that superfluous administrative and bureaucratic procedures were easily streamlined or ignored outright without detriment to the operation. The lower number of personnel reporting information also meant that far less effort was required to analyze the information and thus more time could be expended by the commander gaining a thorough understanding of the situation instead of sorting through sheaves of reports. Also, much

as in the Philippines, but unlike Vietnam, the US counterinsurgency effort in El Salvador was often influenced as much by the junior officer and NCO field advisors serving in the front lines as by those who were in either San Salvador or Washington.

Taken together, the three case studies illustrate a century's worth of US counterinsurgency experience, but also illustrate that, despite this vast wealth of knowledge, the Army has failed to effectively impart this experience to new generations of soldiers. This lack of institutional memory causes each new generation of leaders to learn both the simplest and costliest lessons for themselves without the benefit of learned experience. The following chapter will provide a number of recommendations that, if implemented, can help the Army to more effectively prepare for future irregular conflicts.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. INTRODUCTION

Following the presentation of the three cases it is clear that innovation from subordinates can be critical to the success or failure of a counterinsurgency operation. The case studies of the Philippines Insurrection and the El Salvadoran Civil War illustrate the significance of innovation from subordinates which can be seen to have led to success in both conflicts, while the suppression of innovation and ideas contributed to the US failure in Vietnam. This chapter will present several ideas that, if implemented, will assist any unit in fostering innovation and avoiding the pitfalls seen in Vietnam. The recommendations apply to the Army as a whole, not just specifically to conventional forces or special operations forces. Additionally, the recommendations are also applicable and adaptable to any level of organization or to any unit. Finally, these recommendations apply not only to cases of counterinsurgency, but to all forms of irregular warfare, since the free flow of information and innovation are critical in all operations of a decentralized nature, ranging from counterinsurgency, to unconventional warfare to peacekeeping.

### B. LATERAL DISTRIBUTION OF REPORTS

The submission of a Situation Report (SITREP) periodically is a requirement of most military operations<sup>1</sup>. These reports provide details of the events that transpired during a specified period, and typically contain only raw data, with no analysis from the lower levels of the chain of command. SITREPs contain valuable information from the personnel operating in the field, and there are many methods for distributing the reports

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<sup>1</sup> Some may argue situation reports are required in all military operations, particularly since the advent of instantaneous communication capabilities.

and their contents. The most common method for report distribution is a vertical path, referred to as "stove piping," whereby the report follows a vertical path up the chain of command from the sender to the commander. Reports generally go through the operations section at each level of command and, as a result, depend on the operations officer (S-3) to distribute the report or information to other offices on the staff. A second method for SITREP distribution avoids the requirement for one particular office to distribute the reports, and automatically distributes the SITREPs laterally to various staff sections in order to ensure maximum exposure of the reports from the field. By ensuring maximum exposure of SITREPs, a leader can facilitate innovation from below.

In a decentralized operation, where there are multiple subordinate units operating throughout an area, SITREPs provide the chain of command with a first hand picture of events as they unfold on a regular basis. In a typical decentralized operation such as counterinsurgency, situations differ from area to area and each commander on the ground is likely to provide unique facts through a routine SITREP. Also important to point out is that contemporary irregular warfare operations are likely to be joint, combined, and interagency-run, so there will be a wide variety of both experiences and perspectives to consider in searching for a solution to the various problems such operations generate. As a result, wide dissemination of SITREPs from the operators in the field is critical in fostering innovation, change, and solutions.

The Special Forces Joint Combined Observer (JCO) operation in Bosnia illustrates this point about information distribution. The common JCO distribution method has been singled out and identified as a mechanism to facilitate change and

innovation, and may serve as a model for distribution systems in future irregular operations.

The specific institutional routing of JCO reports initially followed a common ‘stove pipe’ approach, beginning with the JCO team forwarding its observations in the form of a detailed report to the Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) at the Multinational Division (MND) Headquarters. The SOCCE passed the report to the Forward Operating Base (FOB) which, in turn, forwarded the report to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) Headquarters. The CJSOTF then forwarded a consolidated countrywide report to the Stabilization Force (SFOR) operations section, which presented the report to the SFOR commander and reversed the stovepipe by then issuing the report to subordinate headquarters.

The original design of the reporting system required the report to reach the SFOR commander before its release to lower level commands. Left to its own design, the system would have failed to provide timely information to the Division and Brigade level staffs, and some staff elements likely would never have received the documents. As a result, and based upon FOB approval, it was decided that to ensure wide dissemination of the reports they would not only physically be taken to the operations section of each MND staff, but then also copies would be delivered to specific sections, such as intelligence, medical, civil affairs, and psychological operations. This avoided dependence on the operations section to disseminate the information and thus allowed for a variety of personnel to view the reports without editing or comment from the operations section. This lack of bias allowed the other staff sections to glean information from the reports that otherwise would have escaped their attention. Additionally, strong rapport

was established between the SOCCE personnel and specific staff sections, which resulted in the development of further productive exchanges. There are many examples of the value placed on this method by the MND staff as well as the SOCCE, with the various staff sections regularly coming to the SOCCE headquarters to discuss particular aspects of the SITREPs.

In such a multinational environment, this method transcended any national or personal barriers that may have existed. It allowed for a variety of specialized personnel to view the information and determine what information was critical to them based upon their responsibilities as well as their backgrounds. By using this method, leaders avoided the pitfalls of good information flowing only to a few. The more personnel who were aware of the report the less likely personal and institutional biases would influence the interpretation of the information.

### **C. ANALYTICAL REPORTS VERSUS RAW DATA**

As mentioned above, SITREPs typically only include raw data reported by the units deployed in the field, with little or no analysis and few if any recommendations. The reports are a literal regurgitation of events as they unfolded during a particular period, and are provided as a source for commanders and staff members to use when conducting analysis of the situation the force faces. More often than not, personnel participating first hand in the operations in the field have a better understanding of the true dynamics of the situation, as well as a better understanding of the requirements for success. Yet, it is clear that some leaders in past counterinsurgency operations have overlooked the fundamental leadership concept of listening to subordinates and benefiting from their on-the-ground perspective, which results in less mission failure.

Thus, another step to be taken to ensure that innovations from below are facilitated is to have subordinates forward their analysis and recommendations in their routine SITREPs. This method, along with the lateral dissemination of these reports, will better set the conditions for subordinate feedback to be heard, considered, and acted upon if credible.

Though there is a valid argument to be made that most military analysts should receive raw data and no analysis from subordinates in order to ensure that they can produce unbiased reports, it seems equally vital that key leaders be presented several different perspectives on which to base decisions. It is simple to develop a system that satisfies both these demands. A commander need only request that subordinates submit recommendations based on their personal analysis, as well as raw data for unbiased analysis by the staff. To avoid subordinate recommendations and analysis becoming yet another report, the commander can require the analysis on a less frequent basis, determined collectively by the commander and the subordinates. Required analyses would be the minimum ones to be submitted, with subordinates provided the flexibility and encouragement to submit additional reports as they see fit. More often than not, subordinates have strong opinions and good insight about the local environment in which they operate, and incorporating a certain level of analysis into situation reports would likely not present a burden to them, but if properly cultivated would actually be welcomed.

Format for such analyses in some cases already exists in the form of a “commander’s comments” paragraph. Other formats can include a completely separate analytical document. In either case, this format should clearly distinguish between raw data and analysis in order to avoid unduly influencing the professional analysts who

ultimately depend on raw data. Additionally, such a separation also ensures that the chain of command and others will see exactly what the operators in the field believe to be the true situation.

An organization would also likely benefit from a certain level of training in order to develop the analytical skills of all of its personnel in order to assist them in concisely delivering important insights and recommendations. There need not be a cookie cutter template for the report, but an awareness of what aspects of the environment they (and their superiors) should consider critical. Information pertaining to religion, language, territory, economics, differential development, and security typically influence irregular operations in some fashion. However, the key ingredient in determining what should be conveyed in an analysis is the fact that while having an analytical framework facilitates reporting, there are no *universal* frameworks for these types of situations and each group of operators will need to develop one to fit its local situation.

Finally, it is critical to foster a “turn of mind” in superiors throughout the chain of command to both convince them to value analysis from the field, and to avoid falling into the trap of believing that just because they may be superior in the hierarchy that does not mean they necessarily have all of the right answers.

#### **D. FEEDBACK FROM ABOVE**

In addition to incorporating analysis into situation reports along with raw data, a unit commander needs to ensure that the flow of feedback is multi-directional by developing a personal or institutional method of providing feedback to subordinates regarding the status of their analysis and/or recommendations. Typically, subordinates are quick to offer recommendations and analysis when granted the opportunity, but it is

important to make that effort worthwhile. If it is not clear that superiors are actually absorbing the information, if subordinates do not see the effect of their efforts, and if leaders do not explain why they are not taking the advice of subordinates, then subordinates may become weary of the effort they are making and view it as futile. Fostering an environment wherein subordinates believe their efforts and input are at least paid attention can only assist a leader in receiving information that could lead to those changes that may be necessary for the success of the operation.

Giving documents produced by subordinates due attention is the first step in encouraging innovation. One of the quickest ways to stop subordinates from conducting thorough analysis and making recommendations is to ignore such efforts or to fail to communicate to subordinates that, at a minimum, you actually reviewed their work.

Sometimes a recommendation forwarded by one unit may not necessarily apply to others in the entire theater. Or, it might be useful to another unit in a far different location. As a result, it may not be readily apparent to the unit that initiated the recommendation that actions taken were based on their insights. As a matter of encouragement, it is important to pass such information back to its point of origin. This practice clearly encourages subordinate units to continue thorough analysis since it is evident that their efforts can benefit the larger effort.

If the leadership of an operation chooses not to incorporate recommendations from below or feels that a subordinate unit's analysis is not accurate, it is important for the chain of command to communicate this to the unit. This type of top-down feedback lets the subordinate unit know where it made an error in its analysis or that the chain of command has a more complete picture of the situation that allows it to make a more

informed decision. In either case, the chain of command can thus serve as a source of information for the subordinate unit, and potentially help it understand the bigger picture. Sometimes the disadvantage of working at a lower level is that the big picture escapes you. By the chain of command explaining its actions, (or lack of action) it can clarify the situation for units whose perspective is necessarily limited.

Information regarding how the chain of command views subordinate feedback may be delivered by either formal or informal means. Written reports summarizing the command's views on particular subordinate recommendations would constitute formal feedback. Considering the amount of work that commanders are likely to face in the midst of an operation, no specific frequency for formal feedback can be pre-arranged, but it is recommended that the frequency be set relative to the frequency that subordinates are required to report. Replies can occur weekly or monthly or at any other pace, but the fundamental point is that each subordinate knows that the commander will review his work and give feedback accordingly.

Informal feedback can range from phone calls or radio calls, to personal visits by the commander to communicate his views. This method provides the highest quality of interaction between a commander and his subordinates and typically leaves little room for misunderstanding. Assuming the commander makes routine visits to his personnel in the field, one of the topics on the agenda can be a review of the various analyses submitted by the operational unit. This would include what action, if any, was taken on the unit's recommendations. If no action was taken the commander could educate his subordinates about why their recommendations were considered but not acted upon.

## **E. KNOW AND TRUST YOUR SUBORDINATES**

A common leadership principle is that a leader must get to know his subordinates. The purpose for this is typically understood to be so that the leader can demonstrate that he cares about subordinates as individuals, and that he takes a real interest in their welfare. It is less frequent to read about or hear discussed the need to know subordinates so that a leader can better understand who they are and why and how they may act and react as they do in decentralized environments such as counterinsurgency operations. Herein lies another critical component for effectively utilizing feedback mechanisms such as analysis and recommendations. The better a leader knows his subordinates, the better able he will be to gauge the quality of their analysis and, in turn, trust their recommendations. As a result of having this type of knowledge, a leader will be better prepared to analyze and utilize the information provided by a subordinate as well as give that subordinate quality feedback in return. The element of trust gained from knowing subordinates is critical to conducting quality control on feedback and recommendations from below.

This thesis does not determine that *all* subordinate feedback is critical to the success of counterinsurgency operations; obviously, people can come to inaccurate conclusions and make biased recommendations. However, the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that it is important to create an environment in which subordinate feedback is heard because recommendations and innovation from subordinates has played a critically successful role in the outcomes of several counterinsurgency operations. Therefore, in order to be able to distinguish between sound recommendations and those that are not accurate or fully informed, it is important that a leader understand the nature

of his subordinates' analytical capabilities and the level of experience they bring. The commander must also be able to tell when subordinates may have gotten involved with a situation to the point of prejudicing their recommendations. Additionally, the commander should understand the perspective his subordinates use in analysis and whether that framework is relevant to the situation and issues encountered during the operation.

Essentially, the better a commander knows his subordinates, the more he will trust them and trust their judgment. Trust will only come by spending time with the people who will, essentially, be operating in the field on his behalf. Trust can be achieved by discussing with them how to frame difficult and fluid problems similar to those they are likely to encounter in counterinsurgency operations before they ever have to confront such problems. By developing these skills *with* his subordinates, a leader will better prepare himself to understand the analyses and recommendations he receives from his people in the field.

#### **F. PRESENT IDEAS IN A FORUM**

Another technique to solicit and distribute feedback from subordinates is to do so collectively in order to exchange ideas. The diffusion of innovative ideas at meetings that incorporate several levels within an organization can eliminate the potential for an innovation to be 'pigeon-holed' by one single person or element within a command, which is a likely possibility (whether out of negligence or malice) especially when an organization conducts all of its communication in a vertical or 'stovepipe' manner. If ideas, analyses, and recommendations are shared in an open forum with all levels of the chain of command present, then it is more likely that when a good idea is presented it will be implemented.

Since counterinsurgency operations are decentralized in nature, a regularly scheduled gathering of key leaders throughout the chain of command to discuss a variety of topics regarding the operation would facilitate finding solutions to problems facing the organization. This gathering would offer an opportunity for operators from the field to discuss techniques that may have worked in their area of operations and that could perhaps be used to assist in other regions. Conversely, if individuals in one region are having a difficult time creating a solution for a particular problem, then this would provide an opportunity for a large group of people coming from a variety of backgrounds and with a range of different experiences to offer their advice. The value of this technique can be seen in informal meetings between advisors in Vietnam and formal monthly gatherings of advisors in El Salvador. In both instances, the personnel involved were able to exchange ideas and learn from others' successes and failures.

Not only does this technique provide for an exchange of ideas, it also allows the entire organization to focus periodically on the "big picture". This is important so that each sub-element understands how it fits into the larger plan and better grasps the problems confronting the higher level in the chain of command. It also affords the leadership of the operation an opportunity to better understand the challenges its subordinates are facing, what their concerns are, and how better to focus their resources.

Finally, exchanging ideas and making recommendations in this type of forum helps ensure that a good idea is not likely to run into a dead end because of the misguided efforts of one or several persons in a stovepipe reporting system. Unfortunately, this scenario occurs from time to time, particularly when an individual or group (including the senior leader and his immediate staff) is not open to innovation from below and, instead,

believe themselves to be almost omniscient regarding the situation their organization faces. Exchanging ideas in an open forum, decreases the likelihood that a leader of this type will be able to suppress innovation. If enough people hear an idea and concur that it is appropriate, then a stubborn leader may feel the pressure to implement the recommendation. Although a determined, biased leader is still the leader and may obstruct innovation, the greater the number of people exposed to a good idea, the greater the odds that it will take root.

#### **G. SCHOOLING**

Volumes have been written, particularly in the past decade, about how few of the United State's future enemies will likely confront us conventionally (Adams, *The Next World War*). Instead, conflict is expected to become more irregular, with our enemies poised to attack US weaknesses (Alexander, *Future of War*). In light of this irregular threat and the preponderance of evidence that points to the inability of the US to wage asymmetric war effectively, the US Army educational system needs to better prepare the Army to wage irregular warfare. To begin this process, the Army should institutionalize the notion that subordinate innovation is absolutely critical to success in any decentralized environment or situation. The Army must change its own culture which currently places more emphasis on mere data from subordinates than it does on analysis and recommendations.

What follows are several recommendations for changes to the Army educational system. We believe certain specific subjects on irregular warfare should be taught in all Army officer and Non-Commissioned officer professional development schools, from the Officer Basic Course through the War College, as well as Basic Non-Commissioned

Officer courses through the Sergeants Major Academy. The specific depth of study can and should be tailored to reflect the professional education level and responsibilities of the target audience of the professional course.

To begin with, it is important to present the argument that there is an emerging threat in the form of irregular warfare and that an understanding of the concept is critical to success. When leaders realize that they are more likely to face an irregular conflict than a conventional one, and that irregular conflicts can be as bloody as conventional ones, they will understand why they must be prepared for them. Recommended readings on this subject include Martin van Creveld's *The Transformation of War*, Bevin Alexander's *The Future of War*, and John Alexander's *The Next World War*.

After an understanding of the regularization of conflict is established, it is important to create a better foundation in the theory of irregular warfare, which is critical to understanding the nature of the problem the military faces. A balance must be found between the study of conventional warfighting and irregular warfare, which includes insurgency, counterinsurgency, peacekeeping, and stability operations. Additionally, the many roles soldiers will face in future warfare, ranging from being combatants to advisors to observers and members of a constabulary force, should be adequately examined. As Army leaders learn more about the complexities of irregular warfare and the challenges presented by such conflicts they will be better prepared to face them.

Leaders need more than the conventional "Army Concept", as Andrew Krepinevich calls it, in order to increase their likelihood of success in irregular operations. Some prominent readings on this subject include Charles Callwell's *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, Louis Gann's *Guerrillas in History*, John Ellis' *A*

*Short History of Guerrilla Warfare*, Mao Zedong's *On Protracted War*, Robert Asprey's *War in the Shadows*, Claude Sturgill's *Low-Intensity Conflict in American History* and Army Publication RB 100-39, *Low Intensity Conflict: Selected Readings*.

In order to then make the concept stick that irregular warfare is decentralized and that often the subordinates who are in the field executing the operation are better prepared to make recommendations for necessary change in order that the entire operation succeed, educators should use case studies. For instance, the cases described in this thesis effectively make examples of this point. Other contemporary cases include operations in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, in each of which it has proven critical that subordinates be allowed to innovate. A number of excellent historical and personal accounts present useful lessons regarding irregular warfare. These include Brian Linn's work on the Philippines insurrection, Ben Malcolm's account of fighting alongside Korean insurgents, Franklin Lindsay's book on his experiences with the Yugoslav Partisans, and David Donovan's book about leading indigenous forces against Vietnamese insurgents<sup>2</sup>.

In fact, the leading source of information about irregular military operations resides in the memories of those who have conducted it. Also, over the years, millions of pages of after action reviews (AARs) have been prepared by service members, only to be relegated to filing cabinets in units' operations offices. These AARs reflect a vast wealth of knowledge on innumerable subjects, geographic regions, and operational methods that soldiers invariably are forced to learn about on their own after the initiation of an

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<sup>2</sup> There are many other excellent case studies that illustrate the differing nature of warfare that are not examples of US operations and these should not be overlooked. For instance, in his doctoral dissertation, Major John Nagl presents the British experience in Malaya as one of how successful innovation from below led to critical changes in counterinsurgency methods by the British that eventually contributed to their success in the campaign. Alistair Horne's book, *A Savage War of Peace* adroitly chronicles the French experience in Algeria and makes an excellent case study of attempts to apply innovative methods to the conduct of counterinsurgency warfare.

operation because these lessons learned fail to be made accessible or even recognized as a source of information. Unit personnel who have participated in irregular conflicts remain a source of information that is generally left untapped. Unit leaders and/or staffs should make the review of relevant AARs and the debriefing of personnel a standardized technique in the preparation of their units for conflict in the same way that the screening of individual medical records is conducted prior to deployment.

At the same time that a foundation of knowledge about irregular warfare is set and the concept of the important role of innovation from below has been inculcated in the Army's future leaders, it is critical that they likewise be trained on the operational methods previously discussed for facilitating subordinate feedback. Discussions on this should not be limited to the methods presented in this thesis, but can themselves generate new ideas about how best to foster innovation from below. Once the Army incorporates these subjects into its educational system and the leadership of the military begins to better understand the problems presented by irregular warfare, it can begin to train to meet these challenges.

## **H. TRAINING**

Incorporating irregular concepts into training at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels requires a balanced focus between training for conventional warfighting and training for irregular warfare operations such as counterinsurgency. This will demand a turn of mind in the leadership in order that units dedicate significant time, money, and effort to training for irregular warfare. In addition to training events, this turn of mind also applies to creating mechanisms that facilitate an understanding of the challenges presented by irregular warfare.

Once a unit commits to conducting realistic training in irregular warfare operations, it is critical to dedicate the resources necessary to meet this objective. Conducting a training exercise in counterinsurgency or unconventional warfare requires significant time, personnel, creativity, training areas, and money to effectively execute. Planners need to create realistic scenarios that reflect the protracted nature and the various social, economic, and cultural aspects of such a conflict. Training “aids” to play the roles of insurgents, non-combatants, and members of auxiliary and underground movements are required. Similar to the arrangements for training at the combat training centers and the Special Forces Qualification Course, it would be beneficial to have civilians fill those roles. Large areas with diverse terrain or even specific geographical regions that replicate potential conflict zones are also important for realistic training. These training areas will likely require the use of land beyond the boundaries of military installations. Use of off-post land will also replicate a critical vulnerability that US forces will face in most future conflicts – units will not be familiar with the terrain or its inhabitants within their area of operations. Clearly, a focus on irregular warfare will take serious commitment on the part of the military, but this training will be *invaluable* in preparation for the complexities of future conflict.

Another tool for irregular warfare training is the conduct of unit level (brigade and below) professional development programs addressing leadership and operational aspects of irregular warfare. The intent of these programs is to supplement the education received in the army school system. Unit leaders can schedule short seminars on specific subjects at the unit level in order to sustain and improve the knowledge of unit personnel. These seminars should be interactive in nature and not dependent on a lecture format,

addressing general and operational theories, with case studies facilitating discussion about specific techniques or procedures. The purpose of these seminars is to continually increase the knowledge of unit personnel, since proficiency in irregular warfare requires one to be a perpetual student of the subject.

In order to facilitate the seminar concept as well as the continued education of unit personnel on the subject of irregular warfare, creating a pool of specific subject matter experts would be effective. By assigning an individual a specific aspect of irregular warfare, a unit can break down the complexities of the subject. This would allow personnel to dedicate appropriate time to study in order to acquire a depth of knowledge on one topic, instead of a superficial knowledge on all aspects of irregular warfare. Additionally, the unit would then collectively be better prepared to train for, and consequently execute, irregular warfare operations. Such subjects for specific study could include the typical structure of insurgent organizations; the motivations of common people to either support or oppose a guerrilla organization, the requirements and techniques for the security of the populace, case studies of past conflicts, and the study of ongoing irregular conflicts. By educating individuals on the relevance of the general subject of irregular warfare and then giving them ownership of a part of the concept on which to become proficient, a unit is provided with a ready pool of experts that can educate the rest of the organization and assist in the planning of training events and preparation for the conduct of actual operations.

## I. CONCLUSION

Typically conducted in a decentralized manner, successful irregular operations place a high premium on the experience and knowledge of subordinates who must

operate independently in the field. More often than not, these subordinates will have a better understanding of the situation in their area of operations, and actions by superiors should reflect this ‘ground truth’ understanding of the operational environment. In order to foster innovation from below, and to take advantage of subordinates’ knowledge and experience, many different techniques can be implemented both before and during the conduct of irregular warfare. The recommendations presented in this thesis can be organized into three categories; those for leaders, for the Army educational system, and for training. In the simplest terms, multi-directional communication, trust of subordinates, and effective presentation of information within a unit ultimately fall under the category of developing and fostering a proper and effective command climate within the organization. Proper education should inculcate a deeper understanding of the complexities of irregular warfare and how it differs from conventional conflict, while simultaneously providing a solid foundation of knowledge among all Army leaders in order to avoid many of the pitfalls attributed to individual shortsightedness and misunderstanding. The adoption of a greater emphasis on training, particularly for irregular conflicts, will not only promote greater understanding and trust among unit members, but also better prepare them for the rigors and ambiguities associated with irregular operations. By adopting some or all of these recommendations, the Army in general, and operational units in particular, will exponentially increase their probability of achieving success in the conduct of future irregular conflicts.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been struggling to identify the gravest threat to its national security and to create a doctrine to address that threat. No longer does the threat of a conventional war with Russia preoccupy defense planners; instead, the US has found itself increasingly involved in irregular warfare throughout the world. These irregular conflicts have dominated US military operations in the last decade, and are likely to continue to do so in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since 1989, US forces have been deployed in irregular conflicts 36 times, compared to the previous 40 years during the Cold War, when forces were only deployed 10 times, to include the Korean and Vietnam Wars (Seigle, 1999).

In light of this regularization of conflict, it is evident that, to succeed, the military must conduct such operations in a decentralized manner. This decentralization requires subordinates to innovate, provide input to superiors, and make recommendations for improving approaches taken in the conduct of these operations. An analysis of US involvement in irregular warfare operations such as counterinsurgency provides evidence that in order to increase the likelihood of success, it is critical for the leaders of irregular warfare operations to foster innovation from below. By incorporating recommendations from subordinates who are closely involved with working through the problems faced by the organization on the ground as it engages in irregular operations, a leader is likely to glean insights that may provide effective solutions to those problems.

The US counterinsurgency operation in the Philippines from 1898-1902 provides several examples of subordinates directly contributing to necessary changes in US strategy in the archipelago. Most noteworthy perhaps, Lieutenant William Johnston's

report on the insurgent infrastructure which influenced the switch from unsuccessful pacification methods to the successful dismantling of the guerilla organization. Johnston's insights and recommendations were encouraged and accepted by his superiors in the Philippines, and his efforts have been cited as directly contributing to the overall success of US forces there.

In contrast to the Philippines, the US experience in Vietnam demonstrates the negative consequences that accompany leadership methods that do not encourage subordinate innovation or accept recommendations for changes in strategy. The Army leadership ignored several successful pacification programs such as the Civilian Irregular Defense Group and the Combined Action Platoons were examples of successful pacification programs in favor of large-scale conventional operations that alienated the population that was so critical to the successful outcome of the war. In addition to such programs, the Army also failed to listen to its advisors in the field who fully understood that the methods being used by the US and its South Vietnamese counterparts were destined to lead the US to failure. Finally, not only did the leadership brush aside recommendations and innovations from subordinates, it ignored several high-level reports from very qualified people who identified the need for the US to change its strategy in order to avoid an inevitable defeat.

In contrast to failures in Vietnam, and echoing successes in the Philippines, the American advisory effort in El Salvador provides further evidence of the role that innovation through informal feedback plays in the successful prosecution of irregular conflict, while also illustrating how both formal and informal feedback mechanisms may be merged to increase the effectiveness of US efforts. For instance, the fact that in El

Salvador the senior commander employed both formal and informal information systems to create a broader, more informed perspective on the status of the conflict allowed priorities and policies to be developed that were relevant to the situation. It also helped that there was only a small manpower pool feeding the advisory effort. Not only did advisors assigned to El Salvador come well prepared to operate effectively within the environment they faced, but as the civil defense program initiated by one advisor proved they were willing to innovate on the ground to accomplish their mission.

Comparing American counterinsurgency experiences in the Philippines, Vietnam, and El Salvador makes clear our need not only to foster innovation during the conduct of irregular warfare, but to institutionalize an effective system for the development and exploitation of living or experiential memory. Based on this analysis we have made a number of recommendations to improve the Army's overall performance in fostering and then exploiting innovation.

We advocate an institutionalized reporting system. Such a reporting system would facilitate the lateral distribution of information and ideas within and among individuals and organizations, and would cross-cut the traditional vertical method of distributing information in a "stovepipe" fashion. Additionally, the reporting system we envision would incorporate not only raw data necessary for the conduct of administrative actions, but would also provide leaders with "ground truth" analysis about the environment in which their subordinates are operating.

Our second category of recommendations focuses on military leadership. Senior leaders must recognize and effect a multi-directional system that provides feedback *to subordinates*, both encouraging continued insights from subordinates, as well as focusing

the efforts of those soldiers operating in the field. A failure to provide subordinates with feedback on *their* performance is likely to discourage innovation from below. Another logical component in the development of an environment that fosters innovation is to learn to know and trust subordinates. The better a leader knows his subordinates the better able he will be able to gauge the quality of their analysis and, in turn, trust their recommendations. A third effective leadership technique for fostering innovation is to solicit and distribute feedback from subordinates in a collective setting that facilitates the rapid exchange of ideas. If ideas, analysis, and recommendations are shared in an open forum with all levels of the chain of command present, then it is more likely that when a good idea is presented it will be implemented.

In addition to our recommendations regarding reporting systems and leadership techniques, we also believe the Army education system should more widely teach proper concepts and theories for the conduct of irregular warfare. Leaders who have a better understanding of the theory of irregular warfare, as well as an appreciation for the predominance of that form of warfare, will be far more likely to achieve success when confronted by this form of conflict in the future.

Following educational adaptations it will be necessary to incorporate concepts of irregular warfare into training at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. This change may be the most difficult because it requires that units dedicate significant time, money, and effort to the task of conducting realistic and challenging training events. Other training techniques could well include Army and unit sponsored seminars to exchange information about the conduct of irregular warfare as well as the development

of unit level irregular warfare subject matter experts who can facilitate a unit's execution of decentralized, irregular operations.

During the course of developing this thesis we also identified several topics in need of further research. First, the creation and compilation of oral histories from irregular conflict participants would capture a wealth of knowledge and experience for future generations of soldiers. No matter how ancient, these histories hold great relevance for contemporary study because the rudiments of irregular warfare have not changed – as the parallels we found between the Philippines and El Salvador cases indicate.

Next, the development of contemporary case studies for detailed analysis should be pursued in order to determine whether the current Army force has improved since the experience of Vietnam or incorporated any of the insights gathered during El Salvador, many of which remain unrecorded, but accessible in the “living memory” of surviving participants. The conflicts in Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Colombia are recent examples of American efforts to conduct irregular operations and should be further researched.

Given the opportunity to select leaders for future irregular conflicts, it would be invaluable to be able to identify those personality characteristics of leaders who can successfully foster innovation by subordinates. Research focused on the characteristics of leaders in previous military operations (both successful and unsuccessful) may provide insight into those personality traits most conducive to the effective prosecution of irregular operations.

As for areas of study more closely related to the topic of information flow – the subject of this thesis – research needs to be done on the effect of instantaneous

communications and the influence of organizational design on the conduct of irregular warfare. An analysis of instantaneous communications might consider whether the introduction of advanced communication technologies influences how a commander conducts operations and whether that influence is positive or negative when it comes to the execution of irregular operations. Similar to studying the influence of communications, a study of organizational design in irregular warfare could provide insights into the most effective structures for operating in decentralized environments and conditions.

It was unfortunate for soldiers serving in the Philippines, Vietnam, and El Salvador that, despite the existence of service members experienced in the conduct of irregular warfare (in the Indian Wars, WWII, Korea, Vietnam), the Army consistently lacked the means for making that experience accessible. As we have seen in this thesis, this forced soldiers on the ground in the Philippines, Vietnam, and El Salvador to learn on the job without the benefit of others' knowledge. Thus, in addition to demonstrating the critical effect that fostering innovation from below can have on the outcome of counterinsurgency operations our aim has been to highlight the costs associated with our not having a useful mechanism to institutionalize the experiences of those who have gone before – or who may be in the field, even as we write.

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